BBC

DOCTOR WHO

THE EIGHT DOCTORS

TERRANCE DICKS

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Dedicated to
Jean-Marc and Randy
Lofficier.
The facts are theirs,
the errors are mine.

PROLOGUE

The Doctor closed *The Time Machine* with a sigh.

'Dear old H.G.,' he murmured. 'Such an optimist. Such an enthusiast… especially for the ladies.'

The Doctor smiled briefly, as if at some pleasant memory, but then he frowned, as the recent – well, subjectively recent – events at the millennium celebrations in San Francisco flashed through his mind in a jumble of outrageous images.

It had been a weird, fantastic adventure, full of improbable, illogical events.

He scowled at the memory of the Master, treating his precious TARDIS as if it were his own. How had he got in in the first place? Where had he acquired those mysterious morphotic powers he had made use of so freely?

Useless to speculate, decided the Doctor. He would probably never know the answers now.

He looked round the vastness of the reconfigured TARDIS control room, with its redwood panelled walls and complicated console. He had been so pleased with it once – now it seemed to carry the lingering taint of the Master's presence.

The Doctor stood up abruptly, suddenly troubled. Better make one final check – just to make sure that none of the Master's malignant influence remained.

Leaving the TARDIS control room, the Doctor made his way to the cloister room. He paced slowly along the pillared walkways and crossed the stone-flagged square, entering the massive central structure that held the Eye of Harmony.

He stood gazing down at the flat granite sculpture in the shape of a great closed Eye.

It wasn't the Eye of Harmony at all of course, not really.

Just a symbolic manifestation, an aspect, of the Great Eye of Harmony on Gallifrey. Created by Omega, stabilised by Rassilon, the Eye held a trapped Black Hole.

Its inexhaustible energy powered the whole of Gallifrey – including all the TARDISes with which the Time Lords voyaged through space and time. Even an antiquated Type Forty, like this one, was directly linked to it.

The Doctor studied the Eye for a moment longer. It was closed, as it should be. Everything was in order. Except…

In the stone corner of the closed Eye, something gleamed like a tear. The Doctor leaned forward to study it more closely. It was solid, like a tiny gleaming diamond. Surely it must irritate the Eye, thought the Doctor. Like those gritty fragments children call 'sleep' that they sometimes find in their eyes upon awakening.

He leaned closer still.

The little diamond started to blaze even more brightly. It glowed and burned and spun itself into a bolt of pure energy that lashed out and upwards and flashed into the Doctor's eyes, searing across his brain.

The Doctor staggered back, his hands to his eyes and crashed to the ground. As he fell he heard a mocking voice.

'Always one last trap, Doctor. All's ill that ends ill…'

The Doctor spiralled down into blackness with the Master's mocking laughter ringing in his ears…

Some time later – he had no idea how long – the Doctor awoke.

He got to his feet and stood swaying for a moment, rubbing his eyes. He looked down uncomprehendingly at the flat stone sculpture of a closed eye, relieved when its blurred outlines focused into sudden clarity.

At least he could still see. But what was he seeing?

With a sudden shock of horror and fear, he realised that

his surroundings were weird, exotic and completely strange to him.

He turned and staggered away, out of the cathedral-like building, across the stone-flagged square.

He had a destination, he knew that if nothing else. Something was drawing him. There was somewhere he needed to be. His stumbling footsteps took him along a different route through the labyrinthine interior of the TARDIS ending up in a room with white-roundelled walls and a many-sided central console.

This, although he didn't realise it, was the old, traditional TARDIS control room, in all its classic simplicity. A few old-fashioned chairs, a comfortable chaise-longue, an antique table, a hat-stand, a tall column with the statue of a bird on top...

There was something comforting, reassuringly familiar about this room. He leaned on the control console, hands spread out flat. The console seemed to tingle with warmth. Life and strength flooded into his body.

He had found an old friend.

After a moment he straightened up and looked uncomprehendingly around him. What was this place? Clearly it was some kind of control room. But what was it supposed to control?

He wandered about the room. There were chairs, a table, a teapot with an unwashed mug beside it. He touched the wall and a locker door swung open wide, revealing a rack of clothes.

A man stood beside the locker, watching him.

A tall, blue-eyed man with longish hair. He wore a long velvet coat, a wing-collar and a cravat.

They stared at each other for a moment. The Doctor raised a defensive hand and the figure did the same.

Suddenly he realised that he was looking at himself in a full-length mirror set into the locker door.

He stared curiously into the face in the mirror. It was the face of a stranger.

A word formed itself in his mind: amnesia.

He didn't know what he looked like. He didn't know who he was.

He felt a girl's warm lips on his own and heard a voice shout exultantly, 'I am the Doctor!' The voice was his own.

'Well, that's something,' he murmured. A name – or at least, a title. But it wasn't enough.

Doctor of what?

Which Doctor?

Doctor who?

He heard another voice, but this time it wasn't his own.

It was a deep, booming voice, rumbling and husky at the same time. It called up a shadowy picture of a great vaulted chamber in which a shaft of light picked out a massive stone bier. On the top of the bier lay a motionless form, dressed in ancient ceremonial robes. A frieze of Time Lord images ran around the sides of the bier, but the eyes in the stone faces were furiously alive.

The voice said, 'Trust the TARDIS, Doctor!'

Immediately, the Doctor knew that the TARDIS was where he was. The many-sided control console beneath his hands. The infinity of rooms and corridors and chambers that lay beyond it. A mini-universe – and a sentient entity. An old friend.

The voice in his head spoke again. 'Trust the TARDIS. Let it take you back to the beginning.'

The Doctor's hands began fumbling over the controls.

CHAPTER 1

TOTTERS LANE

A girl skidded round the corner into Totters Lane and sped along the rutted pavement.

A thin, wiry girl with blue eyes and close-cropped fair hair, wearing black jeans, white T-shirt and trainers.

Samantha Jones was on the run.

Still running, she glanced over her shoulder and saw a little knot of panting figures turn the corner behind her.

A hoarse voice shouted, 'Sam, wait up! We only wanna talk!'

Sure you do.

She increased her pace, lengthening the gap between her and her already-flagging pursuers. She grinned. Smokers, boozers, bar-room cowboys. The only exercise they ever got was pulling the ring-pull on a can of lager.

Sam Jones was a *runner*, three miles every morning without fail. She could leave this lot standing.

She was nearing the other end of Totters Lane when a tall, redhaired skinny young man in black jeans, black T-shirt and a black padded jacket stepped out in front of her.

'Hello there, Sam! Going somewhere?'

Sam spun on her heel and ran back the other way.

Baz was alone. But even alone, Baz was a lot more scary than those moronic thugs he called his gang.

Unfortunately, she was now running back towards those same thugs. They had strung out across the road to block her escape. Three of them: Little Mikey, Pete and Mo. Mo was short for 'monster.' He was as big as a gorilla, but considerably nastier.

Sam took a quick look over her shoulder and saw Baz strolling along behind her. Baz never ran – he would have considered it uncool.

Sam glanced quickly around. She was running along the side of a high wooden fence, no turn-offs in sight. But there was a gate, midway between her two sets of pursuers. She sprinted up to it.

The gate was locked. But it wasn't all that high…

She took a few paces back, sprang forward, and swung herself over the top.

Sam Jones was a gymnast as well.

As she dropped to the ground she heard the first of her pursuers crash against the locked gate.

She looked around her. She was in a junkyard – an abandoned junkyard if such a thing was possible. There was an incredible collection of odds and ends. Broken furniture, old bikes and rusty lawnmowers, faded pictures in shattered frames, shop-window dummies looking eerily human.

A faded sign was propped against one wall.

TOTTERS LANE YARD, I.M. FOREMAN, PROP.

'Of course,' thought Sam. 'Foreman's Yard.'

The place had been closed for years now – a junkyard that had been junked. It had a sinister reputation that went back over thirty years. Something about a mysteriously appearing and disappearing police box. There didn't seem to be any sign of it now, but there had been tales of people just disappearing – and about strange silvery monsters…

Aliens and UFOs in Totters Lane! Yeah, right.

Sam heard the sound of heavy bodies thudding against the locked gate once more. Little Mikey was saying, 'Here,

Mo, give us a bunk-up.'

It was then that she heard a strange wheezing, groaning sound from somewhere behind her.

The transparent column at the centre of the TARDIS console – somehow the Doctor knew it was called the Time Rotor – slowed in its rise and fall, and gradually came to a halt.

The Doctor also knew that this meant the TARDIS had landed.

And what did you do when the TARDIS landed?

Somehow he knew that too.

You went outside and took a look around.

Automatically the Doctor's hand went to the control that opened the TARDIS doors.

Sam spun round and there was the police box in the corner of the yard. Old, shabby and out of date, it fitted in quite well.

But it hadn't been there a moment ago.

She saw the door begin to open.

A young man appeared in the doorway. He wore old-fashioned vaguely Edwardian clothes and he had brown curly hair and extraordinarily bright blue eyes. He stepped out of the police box and the door closed behind him.

He looked at Sam and smiled. 'How do you do?'

Sam gaped at him.

From the other side of the door she heard Baz's voice: 'Smash it open, Mo.'

'But Baz…'

'Smash it open!'

A massive bulk smashed against the door, the lock gave way and the gates swung open.

Mo staggered through, followed by Little Mikey and Pete. Seconds later, Baz strolled through behind them, Mr Cool himself. He shoved through the group and took his rightful place in front of them.

The Doctor regarded the newcomers with mild interest. 'How do you do?' he said again.

Nobody replied.

Sam and Baz had eyes only for each other – and it wasn't because they were in love.

'I want a word with you, Sam,' said Baz.

'We've got nothing to talk about.'

'There,' said the Doctor helpfully. 'The young lady doesn't want to talk to you, so now you can be on your way!'

Baz seemed to notice the Doctor for the first time. He glanced at him briefly, then turned back to Sam.

'Who is this fancy-dressed loony?'

'No idea.'

Baz gave the Doctor his hard man glare. 'Well?'

'I am the Doctor.'

'Shut it – or you'll *need* a Doctor.'

Ignoring the dutiful laughter of his little gang, Baz returned his attention to Sam.

'I want to talk to you, Sam, about talking.'

'Talks about talks? Very diplomatic.'

Baz spelled things out with deliberate enjoyment: 'I want to talk to *you* about *you talking about us*.'

Sam looked quickly around, seeking some way of escape.

There wasn't one. She tried to play for time.

'Sorry, Baz, you've lost me.'

'You've been talking to the filth about me,' said Baz. 'You talked to that pig Foster. Shortly after which we got turned over. Luckily I hadn't picked up the gear yet, so they didn't

find anything.' Baz took a plastic shopping bag filled with smaller plastic bags out of his pocket. 'Now I've got to find a new drum, a new place for my stash. And it's all your fault, Sam.'

The sight of the drugs made Sam too angry to be cautious. 'Now you listen to me, *Basil*...'

'Don't call me that!'

Sam ignored him. 'We all know you're Coal Hill School's friendly neighbourhood dope dealer. Bit of pot, E for the ravers, a few tabs of LSD... I don't like it, but that's how it is these days.' She pointed to the bag in Baz's hand. 'But that stuff...'

'Got to expand, Sam. This is an enterprise culture, right? Crack's the coming thing.'

'Not at Coal Hill. Not if I've got anything to do with it.'

'That's just it, Sam,' said Baz patiently. 'You haven't. Shut up and mind your own business, if you want to stay healthy.'

Sam was still too angry to be afraid. 'What are you going to do if I don't? Duff me up? Kill me? There's a witness, remember.'

Baz glanced contemptuously at the Doctor. 'Think I'd worry about him? He'll shut up – or I'll shut him up.' He gave her a would-be winning smile. 'Anyway, you got me all wrong. I don't want to hurt you, Sam. I like you, I really do.'

Sam shuddered. The awful thing was, it was actually true.

Baz did seem to like her, despite the fact that she'd always stood up to him. Because of it, perhaps.

'So I thought of a better idea,' Baz went on.

'And what's that?'

He tapped the plastic bag. 'Gonna give you a few free samples.'

'*What?*'

'Works very quick this stuff, Sam. Right away you're really high – and pretty soon you're really hooked. See, once you've tried it, you won't be so snooty about it. And you won't want to shop me no more, 'cos I'll be your source of supply. You might even start being nice to me. Don't worry about the dosh, Sam, I'll give you a special price. After all, we're mates.'

Baz beamed at her, pleased at the way he'd come up with a neat solution to a tricky problem.

Suddenly Sam felt sick with fear.

'You won't get me taking that stuff. I don't smoke – I don't even drink Coke. I'm a vegetarian…'

'Sorry, Sam, you got no choice, not the first time anyway. After that you'll like it.' Baz nodded to his fascinated gang. 'Grab her, this won't take long.'

Baz's boys moved forward. Sam shrank back, towards the Doctor and the TARDIS.

'Excuse me,' said the Doctor.

He'd been standing there all this time like someone trapped by a baffling conversation at a party – unable to join in, but far too polite to move away.

'What?' snarled Baz.

'Let me just see if I've got this straight,' said the Doctor.

He pointed a finger at Baz. 'You and your associates are engaged in the sale of illicit drugs. In a school? To children?'

'That's right,' said Sam, before Baz could reply. 'Now he's about to move on from soft drugs to hard. That stuff in the bag's crack cocaine.'

The Doctor turned to Baz, who shrank under the freezing glare of those bright blue eyes.

'Aren't you ashamed of yourself?'

The question was obviously perfectly sincere.

Baz was stung by the contempt in the Doctor's voice.

'Look, it's just business, right? Keep out of it, or you'll get hurt.'

Remorselessly the Doctor continued his summing-up.

'Do I also gather that you now intend forcibly to administer drugs to this young lady so that she will be unwilling or unable to hamper your activities?'

'That's right. What are you going to do about it?'

'I must ask you to come with me to the local authorities…' He glanced inquiringly at Sam.

'Coal Hill Police Station,' she said quickly.

The Doctor nodded. 'To accompany me to Coal Hill Police Station, surrender those drugs and make a full confession.'

There was such authority in his voice that, just for a moment Baz actually found himself moving to obey. Suddenly getting hold of himself he turned to the largest of his gang.

Mo did all the gang's heavy work. Mo would smash this prat who dared to talk to him, to him, Baz, like he was dirt.

Like he was – nothing…

'Sort him, Mo!'

Mo rushed up reaching out for the Doctor, who stepped forward, took hold of Mo's right wrist and and made a complicated-looking circular movement.

Mo performed a complete somersault, and landed flat on his back, all the breath knocked out of him.

For a brief moment, the Doctor recalled flying through the air, picking himself up and facing a many-armed, glowing-eyed being in a huge, misty cavern.

'Concentrate, Doctor,' said the creature sternly. 'Remember, centring, circularity, focus and balance. Use them to turn your attacker's strength against him. Handicapped as you

are, you should be able to do better than this!'

And with time and practice he had done better, recollected the Doctor, pleased that at least one fragment of memory had been restored to him. In fact he had become extremely adept at Venusian Aikido. Few two-armed lifeforms could claim as much.

As Pete, Little Mikey and Baz closed in for the attack, the Doctor moved gracefully amongst them pulling here, twisting there…

Amidst yells of rage and pain, three bodies flew through the air in a kind of involuntary ballet – all landing on Mo who was just struggling to get up.

The Doctor turned to the astonished Sam. 'Shouldn't you be back in school?'

Sam glanced at her watch. It was eleven o'clock.

'I suppose I should, really.'

'Off you go then. I can deal with these four.'

'You certainly can. Thanks.'

She looked at him for a moment. He was a very good-looking man. Pity he was barmy. With a nod of farewell, Sam slipped through the open gate and disappeared.

The Doctor looked at the pile of bodies, which started disentangling itself into four badly shaken youths. No one seemed very anxious to return to the fray.

In fact, Mo was edging away, making for the exit.

Before he could speak there came the sound of a car engine. He went over and looked through the open gate. 'Cops!'

He dashed straight out of the gate and started running.

They all heard the wail of a police siren. Reacting to a familiar stimulus, Baz and his boys scrambled to their feet, dodged through the cluttered junkyard and vanished over the back fence with amazing speed.

Still feeling bemused, the Doctor watched them go. Ought he to try and stop them? Perhaps it was none of his business.

But then – what was his business?

What was he doing here anyway?

As he turned to go back in the TARDIS, his foot brushed against something. It was Baz's plastic bag. He stooped down and picked it up, just as a blue-clad figure ran into the yard.

A few minutes earlier, Constable Bates who was old and cynical, and Constable Sanders, who was new and keen, turned into Totters Lane in their area car .

Bates was letting Sanders do all the driving – the experience was good for the lad. He was just about to point out that it was tea-break time when young eagle-eye Sanders had to go and spot some local scrote running out of Foreman's Yard.

'Look!'

Sanders switched on the siren and put his foot on the accelerator.

Bates shrugged. 'Just some kid messing about.'

'That gate was locked yesterday,' snapped Sanders. 'Must be a break-in at the very least!'

'All right, all right,' grumbled Bates. 'It's not exactly the Great Train Robbery, is it?'

By the time the police car screeched to a halt outside the junkyard, the running figure had disappeared around the corner.

Sanders jumped out of the police car and ran into the yard, followed at a more leisurely pace by Bates.

They found an oddly dressed, long-haired man standing in front of an obsolete police box, a plastic bag in his hand.

Sanders desperately wanted to whip out a Magnum and

scream, 'Freeze, scumbag!' – but that wasn't how you did it over here. Dropping a hand to his baton he said, 'May I ask what you're doing on enclosed premises, sir?'

The man looked baffled. 'I'm not really sure. I just sort of – arrived.'

Bates took in the strange costume, the vague, staring blue eyes.

Another one released into the community a bit too soon, he thought. More out than in, these days.

'What's in the bag, sir?' persisted Sanders. 'Is it yours?'

'Now I want a word with you about that,' said the Doctor. 'Apparently it's something called cocaine – crack cocaine.'

He gave them a reproving glare.

'Were you aware that this stuff was being peddled in your area? There was nothing like that going on in Coal Hill when I used to live here!'

At the mention of crack cocaine, Sanders and Bates both drew their batons. Drugs often meant guns these days, even in London.

'Just hand me the bag, please,' said Bates.

'Yes, of course.' The man handed it over.

Bates looked in the bag, then turned to Sanders and nodded.

'And where did you get this bag, sir?'

'From a young man – he brought it here.'

'They must have been using the yard for a drug deal,' said Sanders. 'That kid I spotted was the look-out. He warned them and they all cleared off.'

Bates looked at the oddly dressed stranger. 'This one doesn't seem to be in any hurry.'

Sanders didn't want to miss the credit for catching a big-time dope dealer. 'We'd better take him in.'

'I really haven't got time to go with you now,' said the man calmly. 'I'm rather busy. Why don't you just take the drugs with you and I'll try to pop in later?'

'I'm afraid it's not that simple, sir,' said Sanders. 'What's your name?'

'You can call me the Doctor.'

'Full name please, sir.'

Another dormant memory revived. 'Smith. Doctor John Smith.' He gave them a worried look. 'Now I really must be off.'

Sanders put a hand on the man's shoulder. 'John Smith, I am arresting you for being in possession of a controlled substance. You are not obliged to say anything, but if you fail to mention anything which you later rely on in your defence, that and anything you do say may be used against you.'

The Doctor stared at him. 'What does all this mean? I don't understand!'

'Let me put it in layman's terms, sir,' said Bates helpfully. 'Doctor, you're nicked!'

Sam Jones slipped into the empty playground – break was over by now – and headed for the school buildings. She might still be in time to sneak into her next lesson – maths with old Pain. Or maybe she'd just cut it. Her attendance record was still pretty good – much better than most people's at Coal Hill School.

She was about to go inside when a voice behind her said, 'Oi!'

Sam gasped and turned round, heart thumping. She was suddenly afraid that Baz had managed to get there before her and was waiting in ambush.

But it wasn't Baz. It was a stocky fair-haired young man

in jeans and sports jacket. He might have been one of the older pupils but he wasn't. He was Trev Selby, one of the younger teachers.

'What have you been up to, Samantha?'

Trev did his best to look stern – which wasn't easy with his round cheerful face and snub nose.

'Nothing,' said Sam 'I had to pop out during break.'

'To quote the school rules, "Pupils are required to remain upon school premises during break times. Anything in the way of 'popping out' is strictly forbidden."'

'I didn't have much choice.'

Trev Selby looked hard at her. She was clearly shaken up – much more so than was called for by being caught in a minor bit of rule-breaking. She looked worried and frightened – and Samantha Jones was usually pretty cool.

'What's up, Sam?'

'Nothing.'

'Don't give me that.'

Sam looked round. 'It's nothing, really.'

Trev sensed that she was uneasy in the open playground.

'Come with me,' he ordered.

'Where?'

'Staff room. It should be empty by now.'

But the staff room wasn't empty, not quite. A tall young woman with black hair drawn back in a bun was sitting in the corner, marking a pile of essays. She peered over a pair of outsized glasses as Trev Selby marched Sam inside.

'What's going on?'

'I've brought Samantha in for a cup of coffee and a chat.'

'You know that's against the rules.'

'Tell me about it.'

He went to the urn in the corner and poured lukewarm

coffee for Sam and himself.

'One for you, Vicky?'

'Yes, I suppose so.'

Vicky Latimer looked at him in amused exasperation. Like Trev she was one of the younger staff, but their temperaments were very different. Vicky was a believer in obeying rules and keeping up standards – hard work in present-day Coal Hill.

Trev Selby just wanted to get through the day, or so he said. But he was a good teacher, almost in spite of himself, and he cared a lot more about the kids than he let on.

'Sam's upset about something,' he said. 'Maybe you can get her to talk about it, Vicky – you know, girly talk.'

'Chauvinist oaf,' said Vicky. 'What's the matter, Sam? Anything you can tell us about?'

'Someone giving you a hard time?' asked Trev.

Sam looked from one to the other.

She'd lose all her cred if anyone found out. You just didn't talk to teachers, not about some things.

But suddenly it all seemed too much.

She nodded. 'Baz.'

Trev frowned. 'Baz Bailey, the pill king? What about him?'

'He thinks I've been grassing him up.'

Vicky looked baffled.

'Informing on him – to the police,' translated Trev. He turned to Sam. 'Why don't you just tell him he's wrong?'

'He'd never believe me?' 'Why not?'

'Because he's quite right.'

'What do you mean?'

'Baz is right,' repeated Sam patiently. 'I've been grassing him up.'

CHAPTER 2

INFORMATION RECEIVED

Detective-Inspector Foster drew a deep breath.

'Now then, sir, let's just go over it all again, just to make sure I've got things straight.'

They were at Coal Hill Police Station in a small interview room. The bottom half of the room was painted dark blue, the top half a hideously clashing pink. Some Home Office psychologist reckoned the pink had a soothing effect on people.

Foster just found it irritating. Then again, after twenty years in CID, he found most things irritating, though he wasn't supposed to show it. A big, solid, hard-faced man, Foster was perpetually simmering with suppressed rage, a human volcano in a smart blue suit and sober tie.

At a smaller table in the corner sat Detective-Constable Ballard, in charge of the tape recorder.

The tape recorder irritated Foster too – it meant it was harder to add those artistic little improvements to a statement that made things run so much more smoothly in court. Made you wonder whose side the law was supposed to be on…

Detective-Constable Ballard irritated Foster as well. He was too young, too thin, too well dressed and too well educated. But what was irritating Foster most of all at the moment was the prisoner, with his long hair and outlandish clothes. Nothing very unusual about that these days. But there was something strange about this particular prisoner.

He sat on the other side of the scarred wooden table

looking vague and abstracted, as if his mind was far away. He'd answered all Foster's questions politely and helpfully. But the story his answers added up to…

'Let's begin with the matter of your identity,' said Foster.

'I've already told you – you can call me the Doctor.'

'What kind of doctor?' interrupted Ballard. 'What do you claim to be qualified in?'

'Practically everything.'

'Your name,' said Foster. 'We need a name – for the records.'

'I told you that too – Smith.'

'First name John?' said Ballard.

'That's right? How did you know?'

'Just a lucky guess.'

'Doctor John Smith?'

'That's right, you've got it.'

'How about giving us your real name?'

'Oh no, I couldn't do that,' said the Doctor, looking shocked.

'Why not?'

'It's secret. Confidential. They used to call me Theta Sigma at the Academy, but that was more of a nickname really. I always use Smith when I'm on Earth.'

'Very well,' said Foster through gritted teeth. 'We'll stick with Smith – for the moment.' He drew a deep calming breath. 'Now, you were found on enclosed premises, at 76, Totters Lane, in close proximity to an obsolete police box, which you insist is your personal property.'

'Indeed it is.'

'Where did you get it?'

'I'm not sure – but I've had it for a very long time.'

'What's it doing in Foreman's Yard,' demanded Ballard. 'Did you take it there?'

'No, no,' said the Doctor. 'Quite the reverse, actually.' He

beamed at Ballard, pleased with his little joke.

'NEVER MIND THE BLOODY POLICE BOX!' roared Foster. 'I DON'T GIVE A BRASS MONKEY'S – ' He broke off short, gulped, drew another deep breath and said mildly, 'Let's leave the police box aside for the moment, sir. What about this?'

He gestured to Ballard, who handed him a plastic bag.

'For the benefit of the tape, I am holding up a plastic bag, containing a considerable quantity of a substance I believe to be crack cocaine. Is this your property as well, Doctor?'

'Certainly not.'

'It was found in your possession.'

'It was found in my hand,' corrected the Doctor. 'That doesn't mean I own it.'

Foster looked at his notes. 'According to your story, the bag was formerly in possession of a youth who, in company with several others, was intimidating a young girl. You intervened, there was some kind of altercation, the police arrived and the youths and the girl fled. The bag got dropped in all the fuss, and you picked it up – just as my officers arrived?'

'That's it exactly,' said the Doctor. 'Well done! Well, if that's all…' He stood up.

'SIT DOWN!' bellowed Foster, slamming his hand on the table so hard that the tin-lid ashtray bounced up in the air.

The Doctor sat. 'You want to watch those sudden adrenaline surges, Inspector. Not good for you, you know.'

In a strained, mild voice, Foster went on, 'If you could just spare us a little more of your valuable time, Doctor?'

'Oh, I've got plenty of time,' said the Doctor. 'I'm a Time Lord, you know.'

'How did I know that?' he asked himself softly. 'But it's true!'

'The youth with the drugs,' said Ballard. 'You say his name was Baz?'

'That's what the others called him.'

'Was he previously known to you?'

'Never seen him in my life.'

'And you say this Baz dropped the bag during your – altercation?'

'I suppose he must have done. I picked it up immediately afterwards.'

Foster brandished the plastic bag.

'This bag contains drugs worth several thousand pounds. Is it likely that he'd simply leave it behind?'

'It was quite a *vigorous* altercation,' murmured the Doctor.

'This Baz you describe is already known to us as a local drug dealer,' said Ballard. 'Pills and pot, strictly small-time. We got an anonymous tip-off that he was moving into hard drugs.'

The Doctor nodded. 'From the girl, presumably. That's why he was so angry with her.' He looked from Ballard to Foster, his bright blue eyes sparkling with interest and intelligence. 'Surely, what you've just said tends to confirm my story?'

The man might be as raving mad space cadet, thought Foster, but he certainly wasn't stupid.

'Perhaps it does,' said Ballard. 'Or perhaps it's all part of a very different story. We know Baz was moving into hard drugs. What we don't know is, who was supplying *him*!'

The Doctor looked horrified. 'Surely you don't think – '

'Why not?' said Ballard. 'Even the name fits. Lots of dodgy doctors in the drug business!'

'I am not a dodgy doctor!'

Foster gave the Doctor his most intimidating stare.

'I put it to you, Doctor, you were Baz's supplier. You came down to Foreman's Yard to make the deal, my officers

turned up, the others, who all knew the neighbourhood, escaped, and you were left holding the bag!'

'It's a very nice theory,' said the Doctor admiringly. 'It fits most of the facts – and I can see why you find it so attractive. So much nicer for you to have captured a big-time drug-dealer.'

'Well, Doctor?' asked Foster. 'Isn't that what happened?'

'Good grief no! As I said, it's a nice theory, but unfortunately it's utter balderdash.' The Doctor considered for a moment. 'Tell you what you do – talk to those two policemen and see if their recollection of the arrest fits your story or mine. And find the girl – Sam, the others called her. See if she confirms my account of what happened. Pick up this Baz and see what he has to say.'

'I'm in charge of this case, Doctor, not you!' snarled Foster. He leaned forwards menacingly. 'Now, let's go through this story of yours again…'

In the staff room at Coal Hill School they'd been discussing Sam's predicament for some time but they were still no nearer to finding a solution.

'What I can't understand is why you had to get involved,' said Trev Selby exasperatedly. 'If you'd minded your own business -'

'It was her business,' said Vicky. 'It's everyone's business. How could she keep quiet if she knew drug-dealing was going on?'

'Look, everyone knows about Baz. You know the most helpful advice you can give kids about drugs? Find a good dealer, one who doesn't sell dodgy gear or rip you off, and stick to him.'

'That's terrible, Trev – and you know you don't mean it.'

'He's right in a way' said Sam miserably. 'I did know all about Baz's pot and pills. I turned a blind eye, like everyone else.'

'So what changed your mind?' asked Trev.

'You know Marilyn Simms in Year Five?'

'The one with the outstanding – personality?' said Trev. 'Who doesn't?'

'Trev!' said Vicky warningly.

Sam arched an eyebrow. Marilyn was well developed for her age – for any age really. She had blonde hair, blue eyes and did her best to emulate her film-star namesake.

'Marilyn's a dedicated weekend raver,' said Sam. 'She told me that Baz has been dropping heavy hints that some really grown-up gear would be available soon. Marilyn wasn't interested, even she's not that dim. But plenty were.'

'What do you reckon he was talking about?' asked Trev. 'Cocaine? Heroin?'

'He had some stuff with him,' said Sam. 'In a plastic bag.'

She shuddered. 'He was going to make me take some. '"Right away you're really high – and pretty soon you're really hooked" – that's what he said.'

'What did it look like?'

'Like pebbles. Little rocks.'

'Crack,' said Trev grimly. 'I take it all back, Sam. You were right to call the cops. That stuff's evil.'

'What is it?' asked Vicky.

'A form of cocaine. Comes in little pieces called rocks that you smoke. Gives an incredible high, just for a few seconds, then you crash and start craving for more. One single rock is cheap enough. Some dealers even give the first one away. It's a good way to make new customers, especially young ones.'

Vicky said, 'We've got to do something.'

'I know what I'm going to do,' said Sam. 'I'm going back to Foreman's Yard. That strange man helped me and I just left him. Perhaps he's still there.'

'Perhaps Baz is still there,' said Trev. 'I'd better come too.'

'Tell you what,' said Vicky. 'We'll all go – but not now. Trev and I have got classes to take, Samantha, and you've got your next lesson to go to. We'll meet up at the dinner break and all go together.'

Baz was holding a council of war in what he liked to think of as his gangland HQ. It should have been a penthouse complete with swimming pool. In fact it was a wrecked, ruined and illegally squatted derelict flat on Coal Hill's biggest and most run down estate. He had other such flats on other, nearby estates. When the police raided one, he simply moved to another.

This flat was one of the best. It even had furniture, including a beat-up sofa with gaping upholstery and projecting springs. Watched by his gang, Baz was stretched out on it now, talking into his mobile phone.

'You're sure – the gear's still there? OK, good. Yeah, don't worry, I'll see you right.'

Baz stowed away the phone and sat up. 'According to my source, the stuffs still at Coal Hill nick – sitting on a table in the interview room.'

Baz's 'source' was one of the station's civilian clerks, a mild-looking little man with a serious tranquilliser habit. In return for free supplies he kept Baz posted on police moves. He was the one who had told Baz about Sam's tip-off, and had warned him about the coming police raid.

Little Mikey, Pete and Mo looked at each other despairingly.

'So what do we do now?' asked Pete.

'Go and get it back of course. It's our property, innit?'

Mo expressed everyone's thoughts when he said, 'We can't do that. We'll get nicked if we do.'

'We'll get murdered if we don't,' said Baz. 'You know where I got that gear? Machete Charlie's mob, up West. I convinced him there was a market down here. I persuaded him to let me have the stuff – on credit! I was to sell it on, keep a percentage. My percentage is worth thousands, so you can imagine what the gear itself is worth.' Baz looked around his little gang. 'Charlie won't be pleased if he doesn't get his money. You remember why they call him Machete Charlie? I'd finish up in bits, scattered all over Coal Hill.'

This time it was Little Mikey who expressed the gang's loyal thoughts. 'Yeah, well, I mean, that's tough, Baz, really tough. But, I mean, that's down to you, innit?'

Baz had expected this reaction and he had his answer ready. 'Don't you believe it! Charlie's boys are very thorough. They'd start with me, but they'd finish with you lot – just to make an example of us.'

'So what do we do?' asked Pete again.

Baz grinned. 'Don't worry, I've got a cunning plan.'

'What do you think then, Guv?' asked DC Bollard.

Foster took a swig of tea. 'About what?'

'About our friend in there. I mean, we'll have to charge him eventually or let him go.'

Foster bolted the last of his chips, and said indistinctly, 'I am aware of police regulations, thank you very much.'

They were in the station's tiny canteen, a little room filled with tin-topped tables and rickety chairs, with a serving counter at one end. They'd broken off the interrogation, such at it was, for lunch – egg, chips and beans and strong

tea. They weren't really getting anywhere.

The Doctor had listened to all their accusations and theories with friendly interest, and had refused to change or add to his story in any way. Now he was sitting in the interview room, under the watchful eye of a constable, enjoying a nice cup of strong sweet tea and a thick bacon sandwich.

Foster didn't want any accusations of police brutality ruining his case – if he had a case.

'He's too cool,' he muttered. 'Treats it all like some game.'

'We've got him on possession, surely, Guv?'

'I wouldn't swear to it. Suppose the court believes that daft story of his? You say there's no form?'

Ballard shook his head. 'Plenty of Docs' and 'Doctors' on the computer, but none of them matches the description. And there seems to be something weird about his fingerprints as well…'

Foster wasn't paying attention. He was cocking his head, listening to a confused roar coming from outside the room. It had been going on for some time and it was getting steadily louder. By now there were shouts, angry voices …

'Sounds like trouble,' said Foster, jumping up and hurrying out, Ballard at his heels.

When they emerged from the canteen they found the reception area filled with an angry mob. The crowd spilled out on to the station steps, with people pushing and shoving to get inside. The air was filled with angry complaints about harassment, discrimination, police brutality…

The desk sergeant, an older policeman close to retirement, was yelling, 'Ladies and gentlemen, please…If you'll tell me the problem maybe I can help.'

Nobody took any notice. The shouting and shoving went on.

Foster surveyed the crowd with a professional eye. 'Looks like every low-life in the neighbourhood's turned out. Wonder what's got 'em stirred up this time.'

The little station had been besieged by an angry mob once before when a local villain had inconsiderately collapsed and died in his cell. The fact that he'd actually died from a lethal mixture of drink and drugs, after first going berserk and wrecking the local pub, meant little to his friends and neighbours. When the news got out, they turned out in force to accuse the police of murder.

Raising his voice above the din, Foster yelled to the harried desk sergeant, 'What's going on? Has there been some kind of incident?'

'Not that I know of. They all turned up at once and started shouting.'

In fact, the angry crowd was a rent-a-mob – all part of Baz's cunning plan. He'd sent his boys out recruiting, each with a wad of twenty-pound notes. To earn the money, all you had to do was turn up at Coal Hill nick at lunch-time and complain about something – anything – as loudly and angrily as possible. Anyone who managed to get arrested would get their fines paid and an extra twenty quid.

They'd found plenty of takers.

Baz and his boys were hovering at the back now, watching the mini-riot build up. Fights had broken out among the crowd and the outnumbered police were desperately struggling to calm things down.

Somebody threw a chair, smashing a glass partition. 'Right,' said Baz. 'In we go. Try the interview room first, then Foster's office. If it's in the safe, we'll have to jump the desk sergeant and get his keys.'

They'd been in and out of the local nicks since childhood,

and they all knew the layout of the little station.

Melting into the angry, shouting crowd, they shoved their way into the police station

In the interview room, the Doctor finished the last of his tea and looked inquiringly at the nervous young constable.

'There seems to be some kind of trouble outside.'

The noise had been growing louder for some time. They could hear angry yells and the sounds of breaking glass.

Torn between his desire to help and Foster's orders not to take his eyes off the Doctor, the constable hovered indecisively.

Suddenly the door was flung open and a group of young men strode into the room. The constable jumped up and immediately went down under the combined onslaught of Mo and Pete.

Ignoring the Doctor, Baz's eyes scanned the room like radar before fastening on to the plastic bag on the corner table, next to the tape recorder.

Lunging across the room he grabbed the bag and headed for the door. He was almost there when a long arm reached out and a hand grabbed his collar, yanking him back.

The Doctor had no use for the drugs, but he didn't want Baz to have them to sell to the local kids either. Snatching the bag from Baz's hand, he threw the drug dealer casually across the room, and made for the door.

The Doctor was intending to surrender himself and the drugs to the authorities, but instead he found himself faced with a shouting, seething mob. Suddenly something struck him on the forehead and a blinding flash seared across his brain.

Little Mikey had been waiting by the door with his cosh.

The Doctor reeled, but to Mikey's amazement he didn't fall. He staggered out of the room, turned away from the crowd and stumbled down the corridor.

Back in the interview room Baz got to his feet and hauled Mo and Pete off the semi-conscious constable.

'That weird bloke's got away with the gear,' he screamed. 'We've got to get after him!'

Trapped by the crowd, Foster saw the Doctor staggering off with the plastic bag, closely followed by Baz and the gang.

'I was right,' he yelled. 'The Doctor was in it all along.

Baz and his gang set up all this to rescue him and now they've got away with their boss and the drugs as well.'

Foster and Bollard started fighting their way through the crowd.

The Doctor stumbled out into a little yard. The blow on the head had set him back, temporarily at least, to the moment that the Master's trap had been sprung.

Dazed and sick, he knew only that he didn't belong here… and that something was drawing him away. The yard gate stood open, and the Doctor set off at a stumbling run…

Baz and his boys spilled out into the yard. The Doctor was nowhere to be seen.

'He's got away,' said Mo, never one to avoid the obvious.

'He won't get far,' said Little Mikey eagerly. 'I caught him a good one with the cosh.'

Baz nodded. 'We know where he'll be making for.' He slid a hand inside his jacket. 'This time I'm ready for him. Come on!'

It was some little time later that Foster and Ballard, both

battered and bruised, managed to stagger down the front steps of the station – just as Constable Bates and Constable Sanders, were pulling up in the area car.

Sanders, as usual was at the wheel. He looked in amazement at the howling mob inside the station.

'What's going on, sir?'

Foster jumped into the back of the police car and Ballard got in the other side.

'Just a bit of a riot,' said Foster.

'Shouldn't we go in and help, sir?'

'No. Ignore it. Get moving!'

'Where to sir?'

Foster told him.

'Well, there's the police box,' said Sam. 'But there's no sign of the man.'

Sam, Trev and Vicky stood in a loose group around the old police box in Foreman's Yard. Sam put her hand flat against the door.

'The odd thing is, it feels – alive…'

Trev looked around the deserted yard. 'No point in hanging around here.'

'Maybe the poor man got arrested,' suggested Vicky. 'You said he was a bit strange. If the police found him here, they might have thought he was involved.'

'Then I'd better go and tell them he wasn't,' said Sam.

She turned away from the police box just as the Doctor, still clutching the plastic bag, staggered into the yard.

'There he is,' Sam whispered.

Ignoring them, the Doctor made his way to the door of the police box and leaned against it for a moment. Somehow the action seemed to give him strength. He

fished a key from his pocket and opened the door.

'Doctor?' said Sam. 'Are you all right?'

He turned and stared at her, the blue eyes wide and unseeing. There was a livid bruise across one side of his forehead.

'You've been hurt,' said Sam. 'What happened?'

'Sorry,' said the Doctor. 'Must get away…wrong time… wrong place…'

'Oi, you!' screamed a voice from the gate.

Baz stood in the doorway, with Pete, Little Mikey and Mo behind him.

'Where d'you think you're going with my gear, Doc?'

Ignoring him, the Doctor turned to Sam.

'Goodbye.'

He stepped inside the police box, closing the door behind him. Baz rushed forward and hammered on the door.

There was a strange wheezing, groaning sound, and suddenly he was hammering on nothingness.

Slowly Baz turned round, stunned, as they all were, by the impossibility of what he'd just seen. But he still had a good grasp of his priorities.

'I'm a dead man without that gear,' he said conversationally.

He slipped a hand inside his jacket and took something out. There was a click and the long, thin blade of a flick-knife sprang from his fist.

'Hey!' shouted Trev in alarm.

Baz was too far gone to even notice. 'I brought this with me – for the Doctor.'

'Well, he's gone now,' said Sam. 'You've missed your chance.'

'Ah, but you're still here,' said Baz. 'And you started all this, didn't you, Sam?'

The blade of the knife gleamed as he advanced towards her.

CHAPTER 3

REUNION

The Doctor staggered across the room and hit the controls that sent the TARDIS hurtling into the space-time vortex. For a moment he leaned heavily on the console, drawing strength from its vibration. He had an odd sensation of *déjà vu*. Once again, recent events seemed confused, irrelevant. He had an overpowering sense that somehow he'd missed a vital connection.

'Right place, wrong temporal coordinates,' he muttered.

His hands moved over the controls, and for a moment he stood watching the central column's steady rise and fall. Then he turned away, and sank wearily into an armchair. Slowly, his head began to nod and his eyes closed.

The Doctor dreamed.

He was in the same place, the same control room, but everything was different. He saw a white-haired old man with a fierce beak of a nose, talking to a young man and woman and a dark-haired girl. The old man was angry…

The old man was him.

The Doctor awoke and found that he was angry too, his heart pounding. He rubbed his eyes and saw that the central column had ceased its rise and fall. The TARDIS had landed – somewhere. It was time to go.

He touched the control that opened the TARDIS doors and went outside.

He was standing on the edge of a dense forest, looking out

over a bleak stony plain, strewn with huge boulders. In the distance low, rocky foothills merged into jagged mountains. A wind howled dismally over the plain.

Looking all around him, the Doctor suddenly felt a kind of tug upon his mind. He turned and strode into the forest.

It was dark among the trees, dark and oppressive with a sense of brooding terror. His feet found a narrow track and he pressed forward, thrusting aside the branches and fronds that brushed across his face.

He paused for a moment, examining the lush vegetation all around him, then pulled off a twig and studied the dense green leaves.

'Palaeolithic,' he murmured. 'Somewhere around 100,000 BC probably. Now, how did I know that? And why am I using the scientific terminology of Earth?'

He shrugged and moved on. Somewhere ahead of him was the sound of running water and he began to feel an increased sense of urgency. All at once he realised that something terrible was about to happen – something he had to prevent.

Suddenly he heard a man yelling in rage and pain. The sound was followed by a woman's scream and then by the coughing roar of some enraged beast.

A great yellow beast smashed its way out of the trees ahead of him and rushed on by, so close that he could feel the burning heat of its massive body and smell its rank, musty odour. He caught a quick glimpse of the cat-like shape with its long protruding fangs as it flashed past, and saw the stone axehead embedded in its side.

'Sabre-tooth tiger,' he murmured. 'Very fine specimen too. Done for, poor thing, it won't survive that wound.'

The sounds of the fleeing tiger faded away and the Doctor moved on.

Soon he came to the edge of a clearing, and spotted six people. He stood watching them from the shadows. In the centre of the clearing lay a burly blood-covered figure with a sobbing girl kneeling beside him. Both wore crudely made skin garments and had long, matted hair. Both, the Doctor sensed, were in the right time and the right place, a natural part of this savage environment.

The others, the four incongruous ones, were the people of the Doctor's dream. The young man and the young woman were kneeling by the wounded savage, washing away the blood from deep slashes in his arm and shoulder, watched suspiciously by the skin-clad girl. The white-haired old man and the young girl looked on.

These four were time travellers, the Doctor realised, time travellers like himself. They began wrangling among themselves. The old man tried to draw the young girl away, but she resisted him, turning back to the others.

The Doctor was still too far away to hear what they were saying, but it was perfectly clear what they were arguing about. The old man wanted to abandon the wounded savage to his fate. The others were determined to stay and help him.

The majority won and the old man turned away in disgust as they bathed the savage's wounds and then set about improvising a stretcher.

The Doctor moved closer, somehow drawn by the old man's rigid, angry form, sensing the passions that raged within him. He could understand them as if they were his own. And then he realised – they *were* his own.

He felt the impulse of murderous rage flooding through the old man's mind, saw him moving towards a jagged stone that lay on the ground nearby.

Absorbed in the task of improvising a stretcher, no one seemed to notice when the old man picked up the stone and edged towards the wounded savage.

'No!' shouted the Doctor, running towards the clearing.

As he ran the air seemed to quiver around him. He reached the old man just as he raised the stone…

'No!' shouted the Doctor again.

The old man whirled round and froze.

They both stood motionless, facing each other for a moment, and their minds *touched*.

Memories flooded into the Doctor's mind. Memories of his childhood, of his mother smiling, of his father holding him up to see the stars.

Memories of school, of the Academy, of playing truant to drink with the Shobogans, to visit an old hermit who lived high on a misty mountain.

Memories of public life and of rising high in the ranks of the Time Lords.

Suddenly he was in the Council Chamber on Gallifrey, wearing the high-collared orange and scarlet robes of the Prydonian Chapter, his voice raised in anger against his fellow council members.

He was striding down the long marble corridors of the Capitol, still seething with anger. He stood in a vault, deep beneath the Capitol, opening the door of an obsolete, erratically functioning Type Forty TARDIS. He heard the voice of a young girl: 'Grandfather, wait – I'm coming with you…'

These and countless other memories washed through the Doctor's mind, and then the tide of recollection receded and he found himself back in the jungle clearing.

The old man was staring unbelievingly at him.

'Who are you?'

'I am the Doctor.'

'Nonsense,' snapped the old man. 'I'm the Doctor.'

'You are the First Doctor,' corrected the Doctor. 'I know all about you – now.'

The old man glared angrily at him, and the Doctor felt the fierce pressure of another's will hammering at the barriers of his mind.

'Good grief! *Seven* regenerations... I am the First Doctor, and you are the Eighth! I can tell that much, but no more. I have no access to your memories.' He glared angrily at the Doctor. 'Why do you seal your mind against me?'

'Not through choice, I assure you. My past is a closed book to me as well. Until we met, I had very few memories at all. Now I know what you know – but no more.'

'Then you know a good deal more than most,' snapped the old man. 'Who did this to you?'

'That's one of the many things I still don't know.'

'Well, it's quite obvious what you must do. You must find your other selves, all six of them. They'll restore most of the gaps in your memory, just as I have – though only up to the time in their lives that you meet them, of course.' The old man considered. 'Of course, each time you meet a new self, you'll gain the remaining memories of the one before! With most of the gaps filled in, the remaining barriers will start to crumble and in time you'll be whole again.'

'I hope you're right.'

'Of course I'm right, I invariably am. No doubt that's why you came – why you were allowed to come. Well, be off with you, before the time bubble bursts and the others see you.'

'Time bubble?'

The Doctor looked at the group working on the stretcher and realised for the first time that they were frozen, motionless.

'State of temporal stasis – freak effect of crossing the time streams. It won't last for ever, so you'd better be on your way.'

'Not yet,' said the Doctor. 'I have something to say to you first.'

'Oh yes? About what?'

'About that!' The Doctor pointed to the sharp rock, still clutched in the old man's hand. 'When I arrived you were contemplating cold-blooded murder.'

'You don't know what was in my mind!'

'You forget, I do. It's my mind as well.'

'Don't interfere in what doesn't concern you, young man.'

'Could anything concern me more? Don't forget, I shall eventually bear the guilt of your crime.'

'We are currently being hunted by the rest of that savage's tribe,' said the First Doctor furiously. 'If we don't get back to the ship before they catch us, they will certainly kill us. Instead of leaving him to die – which he may as well do here as elsewhere – these sentimental fools want to patch him up and take him with us, making capture and death inevitable for us all.'

'And you had a better idea?'

'I could see a way of disposing of the problem.'

'And the end justifies the means?'

'In this case, yes. The lives of three innocent people and –'

The Doctor smiled. 'And a Time Lord of Gallifrey?'

'Precisely!'

'It's still in you, isn't it?' said the Doctor.

'What is?'

'The ruthless arrogance that has been the curse of our Time Lord race. Nothing must endanger *us*, nothing must stand in *our* way. And if the lives of inferior beings have to be sacrificed, so be it!'

'How dare you take that tone with me -'

'Be silent and listen,' said the Doctor sternly. 'I am older and wiser than you. My memories may have gone, but my morals at least are still intact. You left Gallifrey in a fit of pique, and a stolen TARDIS, when your colleagues on the High Council refused to tolerate your arrogance. You selfishly took Susan with you because you felt it might be pleasant to have her company, without considering what the departure might mean for her.'

'You have the insolence to accuse me -'

'I accuse you of doing these things because I know now that I did these things,' said the Doctor sadly. 'Whatever your motives, much good may come of your leaving Gallifrey. But try to learn a little humility. And remember, you cannot fight evil with evil's methods. The end never justifies the means.'

As the air shimmered about them, he turned and strode away into the forest.

Ian, the young man, leaped up and grasped the First Doctor's wrist.

'What are you doing, Doctor?'

'Let go of me,' said the old man. 'I was just going to ask him to draw some kind of map on the ground to show us the way back to the TARDIS.' It was a feeble enough excuse, but all he could come up with in his shaken condition.

Ian took the stone from the old man's hand and tossed it away.

'It's a good idea, Doctor, but I don't think he's in a fit state to draw any maps. We'd better get going.'

As they struggled through the forest carrying the wounded savage, the Doctor was silent and abstracted.

'Are you all right, Doctor?' asked Ian.

He half expected some cutting reply, but the old man's response was surprisingly mild.

'What? Oh yes, yes thank you, young man. It's just that I've suddenly been given rather a lot to think about…'

Conscientious as ever, President Flavia was hard at work at her desk – a desk overflowing with everything from high-tech data chips to ancient parchment scrolls.

This wasn't of course the same Flavia who had been pitched into the Presidency when Borusa vanished and the Doctor absconded – again – after the Death Zone affair. Or rather it was and it wasn't.

Like the Doctor, Flavia had been through several regenerations since then. In the whirlpool of Gallifreyan politics, she had been been deposed from the Presidency and subsequently re-elected. Now, in her latest regeneration she was President of Gallifrey once again, elected this time in her own right.

Unlike the Doctor, the appearance of whose various incarnations always varied wildly, Flavia had preserved much the same general appearance through all her regenerations. Now as earlier, she was a small, deceptively mild-looking woman with a brilliant political brain and an immensely strong will.

Looking up as her secretary, a pink and eager young Time Lord called Tarin, slid deferentially into her office, she peered at him over the pile of scrolls, papers and

microrecords that covered her desk.

'I did say no interruptions…'

'My apologies, Madam President. Your presence is urgently requested in the Temporal Control Room. There seems to be something of an emergency.'

'Can't they deal with it themselves?'

'Apparently not, Madam President. Besides which…'

'Well?'

'This particular emergency appears to concern the Doctor.'

'Yes,' said President Flavia thoughtfully. 'They usually do!'

Secretly glad of the interruption, she got up from behind her desk and headed for the door. Tarin followed, a few paces behind. As they went through the elaborately arched doorway, five massive young men in the elaborate red and gold uniforms of the Chancellery Guard crashed to attention and fell in behind them.

Footsteps echoing, the little procession set off down the long marble corridors of the Capitol. Marching ahead the officer in charge bellowed, 'Make way for Madam President!'

Sometimes Flavia wondered if there wasn't some simpler way of getting about.

In the vast temporal control room there was an air of restrained panic. Technicians sprang to attention as President Flavia passed between the quietly humming banks of instruments.

She made for what seemed to be the centre of the crisis – an agitated little group of Time Lords clustered around an enormous monitor screen. As she approached, Chief Temporal Technician Volnar turned and bowed low. 'Madam President! So kind of you to come. Perhaps I

shouldn't have troubled you – but then again, given the extremely unusual circumstances, and since I know you take a particular interest in the Doctor…'

Volnar was a small, tubby, nervous Time Lord and the more nervous he was, the more he chattered.

'Volnar!' snapped Flavia, cutting through the flow.

Volnar jumped. 'Madam President?'

'I am here. Tell me the problem. Briefly. What has the Doctor done now?'

'Better, perhaps if I show you, Madam President.'

He touched a control and a mass of complex equations covered the monitor screen. 'There!'

Flavia regarded him with disfavour. 'Is this temporal gobbledygook supposed to convey something to me?'

'Allow me to simplify, Madam President.

Volnar adjusted controls, the monitor screen cleared and a long, glowing line appeared. Pulsing points of light divided it into eight segments of varying lengths.

Seven of the segments were blue, the eighth a vibrant red.

It was noticeable that the left-hand segment was very long, while the red right-hand segment, the current one, was very short.

Volnar cleared his throat. 'This represents the current state of the Doctor's time stream, Madam President – symbolically rendered of course.'

'I can follow a simple tempograph, Chief Technician. Please continue.'

Volnar touched another control. 'What seems to have occurred is this…'

The red segment at the far end of the line curved around until it touched the first blue segment some way along. There was a brief pulse of light as the two lines touched.

Suddenly the red segment separated from the first blue segment and began moving towards the second.

'What this means, Madam President –' began Volnar.

'– is that the Doctor has made brief contact with his first self, and apparently proposes to do the same with the second?'

'Precisely so, Madam President.'

Flavia frowned. 'Why is he doing this?'

Volnar spread his hands. 'Who can say?

'The Doctor's motives are often enigmatic. But this seems eccentric, even for him."

'Speaking as a humble temporal technician, the real question is not so much *why* as *how*? said Volnar. 'In normal circumstance, cross temporal activity such as this is strictly forbidden by the Laws of Time. Not only is it forbidden, it is also impossible – certainly in an antiquated Type Forty.'

'The Doctor's abilities are often surprising,' said Flavia. 'We must remember that he has engaged in cross-temporal activity three times before. Once, at our request, to deal with the Omega crisis, again when he became involved in the Game of Rassilon, and once when his sixth self was allowed to go to the rescue of his second. Perhaps he, or his TARDIS, developed some – capability.'

Volnar looked sceptical. 'On the occasions to which you refer, Madam President, the Doctor had the support, or at least the tacit consent, of Temporal Control, here on Gallifrey. Even in the Game of Rassilon, our power was involved, misused as it was. But this – this activity has occurred with no authorisation whatsoever!'

A tall, thin-faced Time Lord in the green robes of the Arcalian Chapter stepped forward.

'Surely, Madam President, the important question is not

why or how but what? What must we of the High Council do to restrain this criminal?'

Flavia looked thoughtfully up at him. 'I must advise you to moderate your language, Councillor Ryoth. The Doctor is not a criminal. Though he has often been at odds with the High Council, he has, on occasion, served, however briefly, as its President.'

'Not everyone on the High Council takes such an indulgent view, Madam President. There are those who feel, as I do myself, that the Doctor is a dangerous renegade.'

'The Doctor is dangerous only to the enemies of Gallifrey,' snapped Flavia. 'His activities, however unconventional, are usually beneficial in their effect. Moreover, we must remember that he is newly regenerated – and new regenerations are frequently unstable.' Ignoring Ryoth, she turned to Volnar. 'I want this situation kept under strictest scrutiny. You will continue to observe the Doctor's time stream, but you will not, for the time being, attempt to interfere. Is that understood?'

Volnar bowed his head. 'Madam President.'

There was a general murmur of assent.

Flavia's eyes scanned the group, fixing finally on Ryoth.

'By everyone?'

Ryoth's eyes fell and he bowed his head.

Flavia nodded, turned and moved away, Tarin and her guards falling in behind her.

As she left the temporal control room, she could almost *feel* Ryoth's burning eyes on her back.

Back in her office she found a burly broad-shouldered figure in plain robes awaiting her. His uniform helmet framed a stern weathered face with a rock-like jaw.

This was Castellan Spandrell, the Capitol's equivalent to a Chief of Police. He was an old friend of Flavia, and acquainted with the Doctor as well.

Like Flavia, he had preserved much the same temperament and appearance through several regenerations, and was also once again serving in the same post. He was younger-looking than when he had last met the Doctor, but he still looked exactly what he was – the Gallifrey version of a tough cop.

Castellan Spandrell nodded briefly to President Flavia. Neither of them was very big on ceremony.

'I wanted to see you about -'

'Never mind what you came to see me about, what have you got on Councillor Ryoth?'

Immediately Spandrell moved to a side-terminal and punched in a secret security code. Ryoth's face appeared on the screen, followed by a stream of data which Spandrell scanned with a professional eye.

'Small-time political conspirator, basically. Suspected links to Goth and Borusa in earlier regenerations. Marginally involved with the Committee of Three, but too low-grade to be worth prosecuting. Why the interest?'

'The Doctor seems to be up to some kind of temporal jiggery-pokery…'

Spandrell groaned. 'I might have known he was involved.'

He was fond of the Doctor in his way, but he associated him with trouble. 'Where does Ryoth come in?'

'He seems to be keen to make as many problems for the Doctor as possible.'

Spandrell waved a massive hand at the screen. 'Scarcely surprising, is it? He's been on the fringes of three major conspiracies, each one foiled by the Doctor.'

'Is he dangerous?'

'Ryoth? Shouldn't have thought so.' Spandrell checked through the rest of the data. 'Except -'

Flavia looked up. 'Except what?'

'There are rumours of links to the Agency.'

The Celestial Intervention Agency had originally been set up to deal with dangerous and unpleasant problems with which the Time Lords didn't care to dirty their hands. As such secret organisations will, it had eventually become a power in its own right, a ruthless unseen force in Time Lord affairs.

Flavia nodded. 'I see. I suppose it's no use asking what you've got on the Agency?'

Castellan Spandrell shook his head. 'I'm a dammed sight more worried about what they've got on me.'

In his private office, Councillor Ryoth was doing a little political lobbying on the videcom.

'I quite agree, Councillor Ortan, the President's attitude is deplorably lax. But don't worry, some of us are keeping an eye on the situation. Impeachment is a serious business I know, but if it comes to that...' He lowered his voice. 'With all due deference to Madam President's feminine sensibilities, she mustn't be allowed to let her personal relationships endanger Gallifrey.'

Pleased with this outrageously sexist slander, Ryoth switched off the videcom. Ortan was a gossipy old fool, but he had a lot of influential friends. If he could start a groundswell of opinion that Flavia was showing the Doctor undue favour... It was politically dangerous – Flavia would break him if she ever found out – but on the whole it was worth the risk.

Ryoth sat quietly for a moment considering his next move then went into the tiny inner sanctum that led off his main office, sealing the door behind him. He opened a concealed cupboard, revealing a sound-only corn-link and touched controls.

'Director, please.'

As well as its mysterious all-powerful Director, and its cohorts of agents, the Agency had an immense network of low-grade informers. Ryoth, as Spandrell suspected, was one of them.

Among the tasks of these informers, who were rewarded with credits and with political favours, was reporting anything and everything that might interest the Agency.

A metallic voice came from the corn-link. 'Report.'

Ryoth never knew if he was talking to a man or to a machine. He didn't want to know.

'I came across something curious in Temporal Control,' he said. 'Something concerning the Doctor…'

CHAPTER 4

LOST LEGION

The TARDIS materialised.

The door opened and the Doctor stepped outside. He stood for a moment, surveying the scene before him.

He was at the top of a steep hill. Below him lay a long wide valley, through which meandered a broad, winding river.

At his back, and on either side were rolling, heather-covered hills, stretching away to distant mountains. Here and there, banks of mist clung to the hill tops.

The Doctor considered what to do. The TARDIS had brought him here, just as it had taken him to the junkyard and the jungle. Presumably his other self, his next regeneration was somewhere near. The logical thing was to go and look for him.

And there, at his feet was a moorland path, leading towards a narrow valley between two low hills.

As he strode briskly along, the Doctor reflected that retracing his own steps through time might prove rather a dangerous business. Clouded though most of his his memories still were, something told him that he had lived extremely eventful lives.

What had the angry old man in the jungle said? Seven regenerations – six other selves still to be met! So many lives, so many adventures, so many friends – and enemies – all forgotten, all lost to him.

Still, he knew who and what he was now.

A Time Lord of Gallifrey.

A fugitive Time Lord, perhaps? Certainly that was how the First Doctor had thought of himself.

The Doctor shook his head as if trying to rattle his memories into life. What attitude had his people taken to his defection? Had they simply ignored it? Or were they angrily hunting him down? He didn't feel like a fugitive.

Perhaps there had been some kind of reconciliation? A lot could happen in half a dozen lifetimes.

Drawing in deep breaths of the crisp, clean air, the Doctor told himself that for once his quest had taken him somewhere peaceful and pleasant. There was a fresh, unspoiled quality to this open, rolling landscape – an unpolluted, pre-industrial, dawn-of-time sort of feeling.

Then he heard the sound of horses' hooves and the tramp of marching feet. A troop of soldiers appeared in the valley before him. Ahead came a standard-bearer, carrying a long pole which bore the image of a fierce golden eagle. Below the eagle were the initials SPQR.

Behind the standard-bearer was a chariot, drawn by two tired horses. An officer marched beside the chariot, and behind him marched weary ranks of armoured men. They wore breastplates and helmets with horse-hair crests. They carried square shields, javelins and short swords.

Romans, thought the Doctor, and immediately wondered how he knew. He stepped forwards, raising his hand in salute. 'Hail!'

Astonished, the officer raised his hand. 'Halt!'

The charioteer reined in his horses, and the ranks of marching soldiers came to a halt. Tired as they were, they made no attempt to break ranks. They stood alert, grasping their swords and spears, awaiting orders.

The officer studied the Doctor cautiously and decided

that one man, alone and unarmed, presented no threat. Moreover, this man, strangely dressed as he was had an air of civilisation, even of rank about him. Flinging his arm across his gilded breastplate in salute, the officer spoke.

'Hail! I am Pertinax Maximus, Centurion of the Ninth.'

The Doctor returned the salute.

'Hail!' he said again. 'I am called the Doctor.'

'Are you a Roman citizen, Doctor?'

'Indeed I am,' the Doctor heard himself reply. 'I am an Imperial Legate on a tour of inspection.'

The centurion turned to face his men. 'Company – general salute!'

Swords clashed across breastplates with well-drilled precision.

Thankfully, the Doctor realised, his extraordinary mind had somehow thrown up precisely the right thing to say. Had he ever been a Roman citizen? Perhaps he had.

He returned the salute.

'With your permission, Legate,' said Pertinax, 'I'll rest the men for a few minutes. They've had a long march after a hard battle.'

The Doctor nodded assent.

The centurion roared, 'Ten minutes, no longer. Commissary bring out the bread and figs and the wineskins. A handful of food and a mug of wine for each man.'

He turned to the Doctor. 'If I can offer you refreshment, Legate? Only soldier's fare, I'm afraid.'

'It will be most welcome,' said the Doctor, suddenly realising he was actually feeling quite peckish. 'I seem to have mislaid my servants and my baggage.

'Same with us, sir,' said the centurion. 'We lost touch with the main cohort some time ago. We're trying to rejoin

them now. It's the mist that does it – that and these cursed hills. They all look alike.'

A soldier brought food and wine, and the Doctor and the centurion sat a little apart from the rest. Behind them the men broke up into little groups. Sentries were posted and the Doctor noticed that even as they munched their hard bread and figs and swigged their wine, the men remained alert, eyes continually glancing all around them.

The Doctor munched a handful of dried figs, washing them down with a swallow of rough red wine.

'Poor thin stuff, I'm afraid,' said the centurion. 'What I'd give for a flask of the old Falernian in Lurcio's tavern back in Rome…'

'How long have you been – out here?'

'Seems like forever, to be honest. One day's so much like another, you lose track.'

'And how are things going?'

The centurion took another swig of wine before replying, then gave the Doctor a swift, worried glance.

'It's all right, Centurion,' said the Doctor quietly. 'That's why I've been sent here, to find out what's really going on. The Emperor needs to know the truth. He suspects some of the generals aren't giving him the full picture.'

'Wouldn't surprise me one bit, sir,' muttered the centurion.

'Well, then?'

'To be honest, Legate, it's – confusing. We march, we fight, we march again, we fight some more. Fair enough, that's a soldier's life. But – '

'But?' encouraged the Doctor.

'We never seem to get anywhere. Sometimes it's little local skirmishes, like now, and sometimes we join with the

other legions and fight a proper battle. But nothing changes. We sustain casualties, reinforcements arrive from somewhere, but they seem as confused as we are. There's never any leave, never any news from home…'

'Don't your generals keep you informed about the campaign?'

'Hardly ever see 'em, sir. One of 'em turns up now and again, riding a fine white horse and ordering another attack…

'The lads reckon they all live in a posh villa somewhere, eating lark's tongues, swigging Falernian wine and planning another battle between orgies.'

Now that he'd got started, the centurion seemed eager to talk. The Doctor sensed it must be his first relief for some time from the proverbial loneliness of command.

'Then there's the enemy, they seem to keep – changing. Sometimes it's the Picts – hairy little beggars who usually attack at night. Sometimes it's a full-scale army – Gauls or Germans, real soldiers with cavalry and everything. But we never really seem to win – or lose either, come to that. We just go on fighting.' He paused. 'And strange things happen …'

'Such as?'

'Occasionally we run into little groups of men in weird clothes. Some of 'em have weapons that sound like thunderbolts and kill from a long way away.'

'Do they attack you?'

'Not always. Some of them want to talk – weird stuff about resistance, and the war being all a game. I tell the men to chase them away. Can't have mutiny, can we?' The centurion lowered his voice. 'The other day, not far from here we found this great big – wagon, I suppose you'd call it, sitting on the road, with a group of weird-looking people

standing round it. There was only a handful of 'em and we reckoned the wagon might be full of enemy supplies, so we attacked.'

'What happened?'

The centurion lowered his voice. 'The strangers jumped back in the wagon and it moved away, back into the mist – *all by itself!* No horses, nobody pushing, nothing! And once it was in the mist, it, well, disappeared!'

'You mean you lost sight of it?'

'No, it really disappeared. Just kind of… faded away.'

The Doctor thought for a moment. 'Can you tell me anything else about this wagon?'

'Not really – just a big, square thing. Oh, it had some kind of religious symbol painted on the side.'

'What sort of symbol?'

'That cranky cult that was spreading back in Rome – the one the Emperor was so down on. What were they called – Christoes, Christies, something like that.'

'Christians,' said the Doctor. 'You mean there was a cross on the wagon?'

'That's right. A red cross on the side.' Suddenly the centurion grabbed the Doctor's arm. 'Do you know what's going on, Legate? Something is, by Mithras! This is no normal war!'

Gently the Doctor freed himself. 'I think you're right. And I'm afraid I don't know what's going on, but I intend to find out. Now I'd better be on my way.'

The centurion jumped to his feet and helped the Doctor to rise. His manner became suddenly formal, as if he regretted having talked so freely. He raised his voice. 'Company, prepare to march!'

The men began forming themselves into ranks.

'Where exactly did you see this wagon?' asked the Doctor casually.

The centurion pointed. 'Up that path, sir, way back in the hills.' He inspected the re-formed ranks. 'Company, salute!'

Once again the swords and spears crashed across the bronze breastplates.

The centurion turned to the Doctor. 'Hail and farewell, Legate.'

'Hail and farewell,' said the Doctor solemnly.

Battered and battle-weary, but still disciplined and indomitable, the little company of Roman soldiers moved off.

Unbidden, another Roman expression came into the Doctor's mind, as he watched them march away.

'Those who are about to die salute you.'

He turned and moved away up the path.

As the Doctor followed the path into the hills, he thought about what the centurion had said. This was certainly no normal war.

Not with percussion weapons and internal combustion vehicles interacting with Roman legionaries.

He began to ponder the strange workings of his own mind. His memory loss, it seemed, was by no means total. He knew that Romans were Romans and that a legate was a high-ranking official.

He knew about the internal combustion engine and about guns, and that guns and Romans didn't belong together. His mind seemed to hold a vast fund of general information, available if he should need it.

'It's only the little things I can't remember,' he mused bitterly. 'Like who I am, and where I've been, and what I've done.'

Still, presumably another batch of memories was close at hand – if he could just find the version of his self that held them. Which might not be too easy. Contrary to his first impressions, his search had brought him to a very dangerous place. Soldiers at war have little time to worry about stray civilians. It was fortunate that the centurion had been so easily impressed. Fortunate, but also very odd. The man had seemed almost too willing to accept the Doctor's story – as if he was eager to make sense of anything strange.

There had been something vague, abstracted about him too, thought the Doctor. As if he had been recently hypnotised – or brainwashed…

Pondering these thoughts, the Doctor became aware that he had entered an area of swirling mist. But it wasn't simply mist, there was something else about it. It seemed to enter his mind, telling him to go back, filling him with vague dread.

Powerful as these feelings were, he was able to overcome them, though not without considerable effort. To another, more impressionable mind – the centurion's, for instance – the mist might form an impassable barrier.

Determined to discover what was on the other side, the Doctor pressed on. Suddenly he stumbled clear of the mist – and straight into a landscape from hell.

Instead of rolling moors and a winding river he saw unending acres of churned up mud, criss-crossed with barbed wire and scattered with twisted metal shapes.

Lightning flashes streaked the darkening sky, and the air was filled with a steady thunderous rumble. Somehow the Doctor knew that this was no natural storm.

A phrase sprang into his mind: 'no man's land'.

Certainly this land wasn't fit for men, but there were

men there all the same. The Doctor saw two groups of gas-masked figures, stumbling towards each other through mud and poisonous mists to meet in conflict. Most of one group was mown down by a concealed machine-gun nest, and the remainder were driven back in a sudden flurry of savage hand-to-hand fighting. The survivors broke apart and stumbled wearily back to their own lines. Each group left a handful of silent figures lying in the mud.

The Doctor looked on appalled.

'Why?' he asked himself. 'What's the point?'

Suddenly he heard a gruff voice shout, 'You! Hands up!'

Some of the retreating soldiers loomed out of the mist and surrounded him. They wore long grey overcoats and cloth-covered metal helmets that rose to a spike.

'You – come!' growled the nearest soldier.

The Doctor studied his captors. They all carried rifles with fixed bayonets, and he realised that this was no time to argue or to attempt some plausible story. If he gave them trouble, these men would shoot him down and leave his body in the mud, along with those of their friends and enemies.

Raising his hands, the Doctor allowed himself to be led away through the mud and then down into a winding network of perimeter trenches. Eventually one of the soldiers marched him into a dugout, a low underground room lit by candles, where a weary young officer was working at a trestle table.

'Recording another military triumph?' said the Doctor angrily.

The officer looked up in surprise. He wore a high-collared, belted tunic with a row of brass buttons. His youthful face was decorated with a fringe of beard, which

made him look more like a scholar than a soldier. He studied the Doctor for a moment. 'According to our orders, we sent a patrol into no man's land. According, no doubt, to theirs, the English repelled it.'

'And was anything gained – by you or by the enemy?'

'Nothing whatsoever.'

'Then why do it?'

'Standing orders,' said the officer. 'The High Command like to see a little activity along the front line. Stops the men from getting slack.' There was an edge of bitterness in his voice. 'Forgive me, but shouldn't I be asking the questions?' He looked at the soldier in the doorway. 'Where did you find this man?'

The soldier came to attention. 'Out there in no man's land, sir. He was just standing there – observing.'

The officer turned back to the Doctor. 'Spying?'

'On that piece of murderous military stupidity? What could anyone possibly learn from seeing that?'

The officer waved the soldier outside and resumed his thoughtful study of the Doctor. 'Well, who are you?'

'I might ask you the same question.'

'I am Lieutenant Lucke of the Imperial German Forces and you are my prisoner. I must include your capture in my report.' He pulled a piece of paper towards him. 'What is your name?'

'You can call me the Doctor.'

Lucke looked up sharply. '*What* did you say? Is there then an entire medical convention, wandering about in no man's land? No doubt if I were to press you for an actual name you would say "John Smith".'

'I might very well.'

The Doctor pulled up a chair, sat down opposite

Lieutenant Lucke and leaned forward eagerly.

'Do I take it you have encountered someone else calling himself the Doctor?'

Only vaguely aware that his prisoner had taken over the interrogation again, Lieutenant Lucke nodded.

'That is so.'

'When?'

'I'm not sure – not so long ago. One day is much like another out here. He had a girl with him and a young man.'

'What did he look like, this Doctor?'

'A small man, with a fringe of black hair. Curious, old-fashioned clothes, not unlike yours.'

'What happened to him? Where is he now?'

'He escaped – he and his companions.'

'Where to?'

'To the enemy lines, I suppose. The High Command insisted that he was a spy. Yet he did not seem much like a spy to me. Like you, he was angry about the war.'

'What was he doing here? What did he want?'

'I have no idea.'

The Doctor sat back, disappointed. His other self was here, somewhere – in this strange place that held Roman legionaries, armies that fought with weapons of mass slaughter and who knew what else besides. He became aware that Lucke was staring fixedly at him.

'He was mad, you know, this other Doctor,' whispered Lucke. 'He told me he came from another planet, that he had a machine that travelled through space and time. And I believed him, so I must have been mad as well.'

'You were right to believe him,' said the Doctor calmly. 'He was telling you the truth. I have such a machine myself.'

'You too are a time traveller?'

'I can tell you something even more astonishing,' said the Doctor. 'I believe you may have travelled through time and space yourself.'

Lucke didn't reply. He went on looking at the Doctor with that strange wild-eyed stare, his fingers toying with a pistol that lay on the table.

'Just tell me this,' said the Doctor urgently. 'Where are we? And what is the year?'

'We are in France,' whispered Lucke. 'On the Western Front. The year is 1917.' He spoke the words like a creed, as if he needed to believe them to maintain his sanity.

'How long have you been out here?'

Lucke rubbed his forehead. 'I'm not sure. A long time. Sometimes it feels like forever.'

The Doctor leaned forward. 'Not far away, just beyond a bank of mist, I met some more soldiers. They too have been here for what seems forever, fighting a war that never ends.'

'Soldiers like us – like me?'

The Doctor shook his head. 'They are Roman legionaries. For them, this place is the frontier of the Roman Empire and the time over a thousand years ago.'

Suddenly suspicious, Lieutenant Lucke snatched up the pistol.

'He tricked me, this other Doctor.' He tapped the pistol. 'He had something he called a sonic screwdriver. Without touching it he made a screw come out of the butt and go back in again. Later, he stole my pistol and escaped. Do you have tricks to show me, Doctor?'

'I'm not trying to trick you,' said the Doctor urgently. 'If my theory is correct, you and your men and your English enemies and the Romans – and countless others for all I know – were all brought here, brought here and left to

fight. Don't you want to know why?'

But Lieutenant Lucke didn't. The concept put too much strain on his tortured mind. He slowly levelled the pistol at the Doctor's forehead.

'You are a spy! Spies must be shot. Captain von Weich, my area commander, explained it to me. All became clear. If I shoot you I shall become sane again. Everything will be in order.'

A strange, and strangely familiar noise came from the inner room.

'What was that noise?' asked the Doctor.

'I hear nothing. Don't try to trick me again, spy. It is time for you to die, Doctor!'

The hand with the gun was so close that the Doctor could see the knuckle whitening as Lucke's finger tightened on the trigger.

CHAPTER 5

DECISION

'Lieutenant Lucke!'

The bark of authority in the voice had Lucke leaping to rigid attention.

The Doctor turned, curious to see the man who had saved his life.

Standing in the inner doorway was a tall, immaculately uniformed Prussian officer. His tunic and breeches were beautifully tailored, his jackboots and his buttons gleamed.

To complete the picture he had a shaven skull, several duelling-scars and a monocle.

Adjusting the monocle, the officer gave Lucke an outraged stare. 'What do you think you are doing, lieutenant?'

'My General?'

'The pistol…'

Lucke stared at the pistol in his hand as if it didn't belong to him and then fumbled it back into his holster.

'I was about to shoot this spy, my General. Captain von Weich gave orders that all spies were to be shot.'

'By a firing squad, surely? You don't want blood and brains all over your papers, do you?'

'The matter is urgent, my General. The Captain's orders…'

'Captain von Weich has been killed in action. I have taken over direct command of this sector until a new area commander can be sent down from HQ.'

'At your orders, my General.'

'What have you learned from this man?'

'Only that he calls himself the Doctor – like the one who escaped. He too claims to be a time traveller. Shall I arrange for him to be shot?'

The General considered. 'I think not. I shall send him back to HQ for interrogation.' He went over to the table, screwed his monocle in more tightly and stared into Lucke's eyes. 'You have done well, Lieutenant Lucke. You have captured a dangerous spy and handed him over to your superior officer.' His voice became low, hypnotic. 'You are doing your duty as an officer in the Imperial German Forces – here, on the Western Front in 1917. Continue with your report. Everything is in order.'

'Everything is in order,' muttered Lieutenant Lucke, before sitting down and returning to his report.

'You, come with me,' said the General.

The Doctor rose and followed him into the inner room, a cramped combination of office and bedroom. A gleaming metal box, like a giant wardrobe stood in one corner.

The General glanced at Lucke, before closing the door.

'He seems stable enough now. Lucky for you I turned up, old fellow. It's dangerous to tamper with the conditioning, you see. Their minds can't stand it. Well, only the strongest ones – and they all join the Resistance.'

He looked hard at the Doctor as if trying to see how much of what he said was understood.

'The Resistance killed poor old von Weich,' he went on.

'Not that he was von Weich at the time. He was Captain Beauregard Lee of the Confederate Army, in the American Civil War Zone.'

The Doctor kept his face impassive, but more and more pieces of the jigsaw were dropping into place.

'So it's all a game,' he murmured. 'A whole series of war

games with live soldiers. But why? Just for sport?'

'Not at all, old fellow – though it does have its amusing side. No, you might call it a training exercise.'

The General looked thoughtfully at the Doctor. 'I'm not sure who you are or how much you know, but whatever you know it's too much. They'll find out the truth at HQ. I'm needed here, so I'll have to send you back under guard. You won't do anything silly, will you? The only way out of here is past Lucke. A word from me and he'd be only too happy to shoot you.'

The General touched a control on the side of the metal box and a square door frame slid outwards revealing a sinister figure in black leather, clutching a massive blaster-rifle.

'Take this prisoner back to Security,' ordered the General.

The Doctor stepped through the door frame and it closed behind him. He looked around, curiously. He was in a metal box, nothing more, a shiny-walled corridor stretching away ahead.

If it was a TARDIS, it was one of the most basic kinds.

The black-clad guard stood on the opposite side of the corridor, covering him with the rifle, managing to look both sinister and ridiculous at the same time.

The journey was very short. The Doctor had the sense of a quick trip through space alone, though presumably this odd vehicle did have time travel capacity if it was being used to pick up the warring soldiers and bring them here – wherever here was. And if it was any kind of TARDIS it would be able to hold an infinite number.

They arrived, the door started to open and the Doctor sprang.

The guard tried to bring his rifle to bear, but the Doctor

was already too close. One hand swept the rifle aside, while the long fingers of the other closed with paralysing force on the guard's neck. Catching the unconscious body, the Doctor lowered it to the floor inside the machine and stepped out, just as the door slid closed behind him.

He found himself in a large open area in front of two docking bays. One was empty and the other was occupied by the machine he had just left. In front of him was a magnetic control board and behind it a long ramp led upwards.

After a quick glance at the control board, the Doctor made his way up the ramp. It led into a long metallic corridor, with an open door at the far end. As he hurried towards it, he heard a worried voice.

'Doctor, does that mean you can't do as you promised and send us all home?'

He heard another voice reply uncertainly, 'Well, yes, I can still do that…'

It was a voice the Doctor recognised immediately. It was his own.

A third voice cut across him, a voice full of fear and hate: 'You can't! You can't unless… Doctor, you mustn't call them in or it'll be the end of us. They'll show no mercy –'

The Doctor heard his own angry voice: 'You stop the fighting!'

The first voice shouted, '*Do as you're told!*'

The corridor led to a huge, complex control room. The Doctor looked inside…

The room was filled with a strange group of soldiers. He saw at least one British and one German officer.

There were many others, soldiers from wildly varying time periods, wearing a motley assortment of uniforms.

They all carried guns – all except one of them.

The exception was a scruffy little man in an ill-fitting frock coat and rather tattered check trousers. He had a shrewd, intelligent face and a fringe of black hair, and he was gazing worriedly into space, while the others looked expectantly at him. It was quite clear that he was their leader.

This was the other self the Doctor had come to find – the Second Doctor.

Nearby, a tall, handsome man with a long thin moustache stood in front of a communications unit. Evidently he was a prisoner. Some of the soldiers, including a picturesquely villainous-looking Mexican bandit, were covering him with revolvers.

In a harsh, grating voice the tall man said, 'This is the War Chief to all War Zones. This is a command, direct from the War Lord. All fighting will cease. I repeat, all fighting in the War Zones will cease. You will stand by for further orders.'

'Well done, Doctor!' said the Doctor. 'You've done it!'

The air in the room shimmered and everyone froze – everyone except the furiously angry little man in the frock coat.

'You again!'

For a moment the Doctor was surprised to be recognised. Then he realised that since his meeting with the First Doctor, he was part of the Second Doctor's memories. It was all very confusing.

Their minds touched and the Second Doctor's memories flooded in, filling yet more of the gaps in the Doctor's mind.

As the process finished, the Doctor said, 'I see, just as I thought. War Games! What a vile scheme! But the conditioning didn't work on everyone, so they formed a

Resistance organisation, which you led to victory!'

The Second Doctor said bitterly, 'Are you going to turn up at all the most awkward moments of my lives?'

'I'm not sure,' said the Doctor. 'It's not entirely within my control. But surely this is a moment of triumph?'

'Is it?'

The Doctor slapped his other self on the back, so enthusiastically that the little man staggered.

'Of course it is! You've captured the enemy control room, taken prisoner the traitorous Time Lord who helped them…'

The Second Doctor sighed. 'Since my mind is now an open book to you – yours still seems to have quite a few blank pages, by the way – presumably you know what's been going on?'

The Doctor tried to order the jumble of fresh information that had just flooded into his mind.

'Let me see…With the help of a traitor Time Lord, aliens brought soldiers from different wars in Earth's history, brainwashed them into thinking they were still in their own time and place, and let them go on fighting, planning to weld the survivors, the toughest, into a galaxy-conquering army.'

'That's about the strength of it,' said the Second Doctor. 'As crackbrained a scheme as I've ever encountered. Fortunately, it has now broken down – with a little help from me and my friends of the Resistance. However, the main problem still remains. The stolen technology that brought all these soldiers here is breaking down as well – it can't be used to send them back to their own times and places.'

'But you've already got the answer to that.'

The little man gave him a look of satirical enquiry.

'I have?'

'Even our treacherous friend saw the solution straight away. We just send for the Time Lords.'

'Oh we do, do we? And did you happen to hear what he what he said would happen if I did? He said it would be the end for us both – that they would show no mercy. Well, he's quite right!'

The Second Doctor folded his arms and scowled furiously, with the air of someone whose mind is made up.

'No he isn't,' said the Doctor reassuringly. 'Do you really think the Time Lords will make no distinction between the two of you?'

'Why should they? We're both renegades who stole Time Lord technology!'

'Nonsense! Whatever your motives for leaving Gallifrey, they were neither evil nor corrupt.' The Doctor made a quick scan of his newly regained memories. 'And since you left, you have overcome monstrous enemies. The Quarks, the Yeti, the Ice Warriors, the Daleks… Tell the Time Lords about it – they'll listen. Make them see that there are evil forces in the universe that simply must be fought. Just sitting back and observing simply isn't good enough. You have an excellent defence to offer.'

Abandoning his dignified pose, the little man waved his arms, hopping with fury.

'It's easy enough for you to say that! It isn't you that will suffer their anger!'

'You forget,' said the Doctor. 'Whatever happens to you has already happened to me – even if neither of us knows what it is yet! Whatever it is, I'm sure you'll survive.'

'I admire your confidence,' said the Second Doctor.

'Suppose they condemn me to temporal dissolution?'

'I wouldn't be here, would I? They can't have – '

'Don't be too sure,' said the Second Doctor grimly. 'Time lines can alter you know – and if something terminal does happen to me, maybe you won't be here!'

With a sudden chill, the Doctor realised that the little man was quite right. Was he heading for an alternative future in which the angry Time Lords condemned the Second Doctor to death? If his earlier incarnation – any of his earlier incarnations – died, he himself would never exist.

He was breaking the Laws of Time just by being here – and when you abandon the rules anything can happen.

The Second Doctor saw the realisation in his face.

'Not quite so easy now, is it? Just remember, whatever decision I take will affect your fate as well.' He glanced at his frozen companions. 'Now you'd better be off before the time bubble breaks. Take one of the alien time machines from the landing bay. It'll get you back to your TARDIS.'

'Goodbye,' said the Doctor. 'Thanks for the memories.' He paused. 'And do the right thing. Whatever the risk, it's one we've both got to take.'

He turned and made for the door, disappearing just as time resumed its normal flow and the room returned to life.

'Insufferable young man!' muttered the Second Doctor. 'It's all right for him to dish out moral advice. Thinks he knows it all just because he's a few lives ahead of me. All the same, he must have learned something in all those lifetimes…'

The Second Doctor became aware that his two young companions, were looking worriedly up at him. They were an odd pair – Jamie, a burly young Highlander, and

Zoe, a very small, very pretty girl with a computer-like brain. They had been through many adventures together. Was this to be their last?

Zoe looked across at the War Chief. 'What did he mean, Doctor? Who mustn't you call?'

'The only people who can put an end to this whole ghastly business and send everyone back to their own times – the Time Lords!'

Jamie looked puzzled. 'Who are they?'

'They're my own people, Jamie.'

'Oh, well that's all right then!'

Zoe was studying the Second Doctor's worried face.

'It isn't all right, is it, Doctor?'

'No,' said the Second Doctor resignedly. 'But I'm afraid there's no alternative.'

Dropping cross-legged to the floor, he took six blank white cards from his pocket, dealing them out before him.

Jamie gave Zoe a baffled look. 'What's he doing?'

But the War Chief knew only too well. 'Don't do it, Doctor,' he roared. 'You know what will happen!' He leaped at the Second Doctor, as if to restrain him by force.

The English and the German officers grabbed the War Chief and held him back.

The Second Doctor ignored them all, his face a blank mask of concentration.

On the ground before him, the six white cards floated into the air and arranged themselves into a plain white cube.

Jamie and Zoe kneeled beside him.

'Doctor, are you all right?' asked Zoe anxiously.

The Doctor opened his eyes. 'Yes, Zoe, I'm all right.'

Jamie stared at the box, boggle-eyed. 'Doctor, what's that?'

'It's a box, Jamie.'

'I know, I can see that!'

The Doctor picked up the box and held it in his hands. 'A very special sort of box. It now contains all the information about what's been going on here – and an appeal for help.'

'Help? Who from?'

'The Time Lords?' asked Zoe.

'Yes, Zoe, the Time Lords.'

Jamie was still baffled. To him the Doctor was a kind of all-powerful wizard.

'But why haven't you asked them for help before?'

The Doctor struggled to his feet. 'I've never really needed it before, Jamie, but this business of sending everyone back to their own times – well, it's too difficult for me…'

He looked at the plain white box in his hands. In reality, it was a kind of miniature TARDIS. A simple telepathic impulse and it would materialise instantly on Gallifrey, a summons that could not be ignored.

The Second Doctor tucked the box away in one of the capacious pockets of his frock coat. The message was ready, but he wouldn't send it, not quite yet. He was still grappling with his conscience, still trying to postpone the fateful decision. Perhaps he could still find some way to preserve his freedom.

The Doctor, meanwhile, was in the Roman Zone, making his way back to his TARDIS. It had been a simple matter to set the control board so that the alien machine in the docking bay would take him there.

He had interfered enough in his own past. He must leave his second self to work out his own destiny.

As he strode along, the Doctor wondered what the little man would decide. He followed the winding path around the steep side of the hill and suddenly found a Roman chariot coming towards him, flanked by columns of marching men. But this was a very different group of men from the ones he had met before. The soldiers were cheerful and alert, marching briskly along the path.

At the sight of the Doctor, the centurion raised his hand to halt the men.

'Company, halt! General salute!'

Swords and shields rattled across bronze breastplates once more.

The centurion hurried forward to meet him, face beaming. 'Well done, Legate, well done! You sorted it out, just like you promised.'

'I did?'

'The general has just brought us the new orders, direct from Rome. No more fighting! There's been some kind of treaty with the barbarian tribes!'

The Doctor remembered the angry prisoner in the alien control room, ordering a cease fire. The Second Doctor had achieved that – *be* had achieved that.

The Doctor felt a rush of justifiable pride. They had stopped the slaughter!

'Now, don't tell me you didn't have something to do with it!' the centurion went on.

'Well, perhaps just a little,' said the Doctor modestly.

'Better still, we're all going home soon!"

'I'm very glad to hear it.'

That, thought the Doctor, wasn't nearly such a sure thing. Not unless his earlier self had sent for the Time Lords…

The centurion picked up the trace of uncertainty in his

reply. 'We are going home, aren't we, Legate?'

'I hope so,' said the Doctor. 'I very much hope so.'

'But you're not sure?'

'Well, it's a tricky thing to arrange – so many men…'

The centurion sighed. 'The lads have set their hearts on seeing Rome again. So have I, to tell the truth.'

'I know,' said the Doctor. 'A flask of the old Falernian in Lurcio's tavern…'

'That's right,' said the centurion.

Suddenly the Doctor became aware that the mist was spreading over the hillside. The centurion's voice was fading. The centurion himself was fading, together with his horses his chariot and all his men. Slowly the Romans disappeared into the swirling mists…

The Doctor gave a sigh of relief. This could only be the work of the Time Lords. His second self had summoned them after all. The War Games were over at last – and there, on the hillside was his TARDIS.

The Doctor hurried towards it.

CHAPTER 6

ESCAPE

The high-speed hovercraft roared out of the sea mists and surged up the shingle beach that bordered the naval base.

Two sailors ran towards it from the waiting ambulance, carrying a stretcher between them. A naval captain followed them, accompanied by a very small, very pretty girl in a white trouser suit.

The landing ramp of the hovercraft dropped, and a tall, white-haired man emerged, followed by the hovercraft pilot. The tall man strode rapidly up the beach. He had a lined, young-old face and he wore a bulky, bright-orange padded rubber suit – submarine escape equipment.

Jo Grant's face brightened at the sight of him.

'They said someone was hurt…'

'It's the Master,' said the Doctor – the Third Doctor. 'He collapsed soon after they picked us up.'

'Well then, Doctor, what happened?' asked the naval captain.

'I managed to destroy their base for you.'

Captain Hart gave a sigh of sheer relief. With the help of the Doctor he had been battling with man-like, marine-based reptiles known as Sea Devils. Aided by an escaped criminal master-mind called the Master, the Sea Devils had destroyed shipping, invaded a sea-fort, and even attacked his own naval base. Now, at last, the menace was ended.

'Thank goodness!' said Captain Hart. 'Well done!'

There was no pleasure, no triumph in the Doctor's voice.

'I did what I had to, to prevent a war.'

The two sailors from the ambulance made their way back from the hovercraft. On the stretcher lay a still form, blanket-covered to the chin. The sallow bearded face was waxy-looking, curiously frozen.

'He's dead,' whispered Jo.

The Third Doctor shook his head. The Master dead at last, all his villainy at an end, it scarcely seemed possible.

It wasn't.

'We were too late,' said one of the stretcher-bearers. 'The doctor in the hovercraft said so.'

The Third Doctor stared at him. The hovercraft had had only a two-man crew, both sailors.

'Doctor? What doctor?'

He suddenly looked down that the face of his old enemy and reached out to touch it. The face came away in his hand. Beneath the mask he saw the wide, hypnotised eyes of the crewman from the hovercraft.

'I must obey,' he whispered. 'I must obey. I must obey…'

Even as the Doctor realised what must have happened, there came a roar of engines from the shoreline. He swung round, and caught a brief glimpse of the bearded figure at the controls. The Master waved a hand in sardonic salute, and the high-speed hovercraft swung round and zoomed away out to sea, vanishing into the mists.

The Third Doctor stared after it, with a look on his face that might almost have been one of admiration.

'He's escaped!' yelled Hart.

'He has indeed,' said the Doctor dryly.

'We must go after him,' said Captain Hart. 'I'll organise a pursuit – fast launches, helicopters, whatever it takes.'

'Can you catch up with him?' asked Jo Grant.

'It won't be easy – that hovercraft's the latest high-speed model. But we can cut him off. There are plenty of ships in the area. Don't worry, Doctor, we'll get him!'

'I very much doubt it,' said the Third Doctor quietly.

Hart turned away and hurried towards his office.

'Surely they'll find the hovercraft eventually,' said Jo. 'A thing that size is hard to miss.'

'Oh, they'll find the hovercraft all right, but the Master will be long gone. He'll ditch the hovercraft for some less conspicuous form of transport. Another boat, or perhaps a car. We'd better go inside and see what's happening.'

He took Jo's arm and led her towards the base.

As the Doctor had guessed, the Master had no intention of staying with the hovercraft. It was large, noisy and eminently noticeable – bad qualities in a getaway vehicle.

Swinging the hovercraft round, the Master sped along parallel to the coast, gradually edging closer and closer to land. He spotted a rocky inlet, a narrow gash in the coastline, and steered right inside it. Opening the ramp he jumped out and began scrambling up the narrow path that led to the clifftop.

Big Jack Harris was in a happy mood as he drove his Ford Cortina along the coastal road towards Portsmouth. He was a travelling salesman – gifts and novelties for the tourist shops in the towns along the south coast. A very large, round-faced man, Jack was cheerful by nature, and life seemed particularly good just at the moment. He'd had a successful sales round and for once his order book was full. He was planning to have a night out in Portsmouth, before making his way home to the wife and kids next day.

Jack liked Portsmouth. Lots of good pubs…

He frowned as he saw a black-clad figure signalling from the roadside. Jack often picked up hitch-hikers – pretty girls for choice. But this was a deserted stretch of road, a rotten place to be stranded, and the bearded bloke seemed harmless enough. Some kind of foreigner by the look of him.

Jack pulled up and wound down the window. 'Need a ride, mate?'

The man hurried towards him. 'I'm sorry to trouble you, but I wonder if you could give me a lift? I'm a yachtsman and my boat sprang a leak. I had to come ashore…'

His voice was deep and cultured, with a tinge of some unidentifiable accent. Funny outfit for a yachtsman, thought Jack. Still, you never knew with foreigners.

'I can take you as far as Portsmouth, if that's any use,' he said. 'You can get help there.'

'I should be very grateful.'

Jack opened the passenger door and the man jumped in. They drove on.

'Must be nice, having a boat,' Jack began.

'It has its problems.'

The bearded man then lapsed into brooding silence.

Jack was disappointed. He expected his hitchhiking passengers to pay for their ride with conversation.

'Commercial traveller myself, all along the coast. Toys, novelties, gifts and souvenirs…'

'Fascinating.'

'Soon be in Portsmouth,' Jack continued chattily. 'I'm having a night on the town, then home to London tomorrow.'

'I need to go much further than Portsmouth.'

'Well, you're on your own there, mate. Portsmouth's my limit.'

'You will take me wherever I wish to go,' said the bearded man arrogantly.

Easygoing as he was, Big Jack Harris never stood any nonsense from his hitchhikers. One man young man had actually tried to mug him, but Jack had thumped him senseless and dropped him off at the nearest police station.

He pulled the car up with a jerk. 'Look mate, it's Portsmouth and that's it. If that's not good enough, you can get out now and try your luck with someone else.'

The bearded man stared at him with deep-set brooding eyes.

'I am the Master. You will obey me. You will obey me…' The voice was deep and commanding.

Jack Harris laughed out loud. 'You're wasting your time, mate, that stuff doesn't work on me. Some stage hypnotist bloke tried at the Portsmouth Empire. Didn't get anywhere – I'm immune!'

'How very unfortunate for you,' said the bearded man.

Suddenly there was a small black device in his hand. Jack stared at it unbelievingly. A gun? It seemed too small for that. A spasm of agony squeezed him and his body seemed to implode…

Soon afterwards the car sped on its way, the black-clad, bearded man at the wheel.

There was no sign of Big Jack Harris at all.

In Captain Hart's office on the naval base, Jo Grant and the Third Doctor followed the progress of the hunt for the Master at long range.

The Doctor had abandoned his escape suit and was his usual elegant self in a blue velvet jacket and ruffled white shirt.

Captain Hart slammed down the telephone. 'They've found the hovercraft, Doctor. Abandoned in a cove a few miles up the coast.

The Doctor nodded. 'Too conspicuous. He'll have ditched it as soon as possible. I take it there was no sign of the Master?'

Hart shook his head.

The Doctor turned to Jo. 'Get me the Brigadier, will you, Jo?'

Jo Grant looked at Captain Hart for permission. He nodded, pushing the phone across the desk towards her. She dialled the UNIT emergency number, reflecting that although the most complex of mathematical formulae were simplicity itself to the Doctor, simple things like passes, codewords and telephone numbers appeared to be beyond him. She gave the UNIT operator the necessary passwords, and got through to the Brigadier.

'Miss Grant, what the devil's going on down there? I've been getting the most extraordinary reports from the Ministry – and complaints of gross insolence from some high-ranking Ministry official called Walker… Where's the Doctor?'

'Right here, sir,' said Jo hurriedly. 'Perhaps he'd better explain…'

She beckoned the Doctor, who gave her a quizzical glance and took the receiver.

'Lethbridge-Stewart? How are you my dear feller?'

An angry squawking came from the telephone. The Doctor held the receiver away from his ear for a moment.

'Calm down, Brigadier, and I'll explain everything. Now, I've got good news and bad news. To begin with, I've dealt with the Sea Devils…Yes, they were a marine version of

those creatures that turned up in the caves. No not Silurians, that was a misnomer, quite the wrong geological period… Eocenes, if you like. What? Well, as a matter of feet, I blew up their base…'

The Doctor listened for a moment, his face set in a frown. Then, 'No, that does not prove you were right all along, Brigadier,' he said indignantly. 'The circumstances were entirely different! I've told you before, the instinctive unthinking use of force is totally unjustified. You do not solve a problem by blowing it up – well, only in very exceptional circumstances!'

Jo cleared her throat loudly, caught the Doctor's eye and glanced towards Captain Hart, who was listening to this inter-UNIT squabbling with undisguised interest.

'Well, anyway, we can discuss that later,' said the Doctor. 'Now for the bad news. The Master's escaped.'

There was another outburst of anguished squawking from the telephone.

'Yes, apparently he was mixed up in the thing from the beginning,' said the Doctor. 'He won over Trenchard, the prison governor, who helped him to steal naval equipment to contact the Sea Devils. We escaped from their base together and the navy took him prisoner when we were rescued. He faked a collapse, stole a hovercraft and escaped.'

More indignant spluttering from the telephone.

'There's no point in being unkind about our naval friends,' said the Doctor severely. 'They've been very helpful – and we haven't done too brilliantly against the Master ourselves, have we? He's a tricky devil."

His voice hardened. 'Now listen, Brigadier, kindly stop chuntering and start making yourself useful. We've found the stolen hovercraft on the coast, a few miles from

Portsmouth. No sign of the Master of course. I want you to liaise with the police, locally and nationally. Get them to circulate a description and put out a general alarm. Tell them to be sure to emphasise that the Master's dangerous – "If seen, do not approach but inform the authorities immediately", you know the sort of thing. What? No, Miss Grant and I will stay here for a while in case he turns up in the area. If nothing happens by tonight, we'll head back to UNIT HQ. It's been nice talking to you, Brigadier, but there's no time for any more idle chit-chat. You've got a lot to do. Just get on with it, there's a good chap!'

The Doctor slammed the telephone down on the Brigadier's angry expostulations and turned apologetically to Captain Hart.

'Splendid chap, Lethbridge-Stewart, but he's inclined to get a bit tetchy when things go wrong!'

'I gather from Miss Grant that you're his regular Scientific Adviser,' said Captain Hart.

'Yes, that's right.'

'Work together all the time, do you?' asked Hart casually.

He had just spent a considerable amount of time co-operating with the Doctor on this Sea Devil business. It occurred to him that if the Brigadier had this Doctor for a full-time colleague, he probably had a good deal to be tetchy about.

The Doctor gave him a puzzled look. 'Yes, of course we work together. Why do you -' He broke off and chuckled. 'My dear Captain, don't be misled by all that argy-bargy on the telephone. The Brigadier and I are the best of friends. We get on like a house on fire, don't we Jo?'

'More like a fireworks factory on fire,' said Jo, ruefully.

'Old Lethbridge-Stewart may be a bit short-tempered, but

he's very efficient. He'll be putting a bomb under the police by now. If the Master's still anywhere around, we'll find him!'

It was several hours later and the Master was driving across country, keeping to back roads and staying well within the speed-limit. The last thing he wanted was to attract attention before reaching his destination.

He wasn't too worried about the possibility of the car being reported stolen. There was a good chance that no one was expecting its late owner at any specific time. The main danger was that he himself would be recognised. The Doctor would have a description out by now. On a sudden impulse the Master switched on the car radio, scanning the wavebands until he found a news bulletin. For several minutes he listened impatiently to a meaningless recital of petty human affairs. He was about to switch off when the newsreader said, 'Finally, here is a police message. An extremely dangerous prisoner has escaped from a special high-security prison in the Portsmouth area. He is described as being black-haired, of medium height, powerfully built, with a sallow complexion, deep-set eyes and a short black beard.'

'Not very flattering, Doctor,' murmured the Master. 'What happened to "Handsome and distinguished"?'

'This man is extremely dangerous,' the announcer went on. 'If you see him do not approach, but inform the authorities immediately. When last seen, the prisoner was wearing a black suit with a high-collared jacket.'

The Master stopped the car and rummaged in the back. A fawn car-coat with a tartan collar lay across the back seat. He shuddered, reached for it and put it on. There was a cap

in one pocket and a tartan scarf in the other. He put on the cap, pulling it down over his eyes, and wound the scarf around his neck, pulling it up under his nose to conceal his beard. Then he drove on, a shapeless figure hunched behind the wheel.

At the next main-road junction there was a police car parked. As he approached, a policeman got out, holding up his hand. Obediently the Master stopped the car and the constable walked over.

The Master wound down the window. 'Any trouble, officer? What have I done now?' He spoke in the wheezing, fruity voice of the late Mr Harris.

'Just a routine check, sir,' said the policeman. He peered at the figure behind the wheel. 'I wonder if you'd be good enough to take off your hat and pull down that scarf.'

The Master obeyed and the young constable's eyes widened. His hand reached instinctively for the handle of his truncheon.

'Could I see your driving licence, sir?'

The Master chuckled. 'Not without a magnifying glass, I fancy,' he said in his own voice. He stared deep into the young policeman's eyes, and his voice became deep and commanding. 'I know what you are thinking, but you're wrong you know, quite wrong. Just listen to me and I'll explain. *Listen to me*…'

Minutes later, the constable straightened up and stepped back.

'Sorry to hold you up, sir.'

He waved the Master on.

As the Cortina sped away, the constable returned to the police car and got back in the front passenger seat.

'No joy, Sarge.'

'Pity. I thought that one looked promising.'

'Nothing like, sarge. Big fair-haired bloke with a red face. Commercial traveller.'

The sergeant stared at him. 'You what?'

'He was a big bloke, red face and fair hair. Nothing like the description.'

The sergeant stared at him. 'Look, I know I wasn't as near as you, but I saw a medium-sized dark bloke, all muffled up. And as he drove past just now I thought I saw a black beard.'

'No way,' said the constable confidently. 'He showed me his licence and everything.'

'He did no such thing,' said the sergeant. 'I was watching. You chatted for a bit, you bent down and stared into the car and soon after that you stood up and waved him on.'

Still staring hard at his baffled colleague, he reached for the radio.

'I see,' said the Third Doctor. 'You were quite right to pass on the report, Inspector, I think it's *very* significant. Now, can you tell me exactly where this happened?'

The Doctor snapped his fingers and held out his hand. Jo put a pencil in it and slid a notepad onto the desk.The Doctor scribbled rapidly.

'Thank you again. And be sure to congratulate that sergeant for me!'

'Have they found him?' asked Jo.

'Not exactly,' said the Doctor. 'But I think we may be on his track.'

'What happened?'

'Two policemen checking cars at a junction. Car comes along, one of them goes over to talk to the driver, then waves him on.'

'So?'

'The policeman who talked to the driver saw a big, red-faced man with fair hair who showed him his driving licence. The one who stayed in the police car saw a medium sized dark man with a beard who did no such thing!'

'The Master!' said Jo.

Captain Hart looked baffled. 'I'm sorry, I don't understand.'

'The Master is a skilled hypnotist,' said the Doctor. 'Isn't that right, Jo?'

Jo shuddered. 'He did it to me once.'

'And it worked?' asked Captain Hart sceptically.

'I'll say. I brought a bomb into UNIT HQ and tried to blow up the Doctor!'

'Captain Hart,' snapped the Doctor. 'Kindly oblige me with a large-scale Ordnance Survey map of southern England and a reel of black cotton!'

Captain Hart gave his secretary a baffled look. 'Jane?'

The ever-efficient Third Officer Blythe said, 'There'll be a map in the map room, sir, and I've got a sewing kit in my desk.' She hurried from the room, returning shortly with both items.

The Doctor spread the map out on the floor. 'Captain Hart, be good enough to show me *exactly* where the stolen hovercraft was found abandoned.'

Hart squatted beside the map. After a moment he pointed to a spot on the coastline. 'Just there.'

The Doctor unrolled some black cotton. 'Just hold the end there, please, on that spot.' He glanced at his notes. 'The Master – if it was the Master – was spotted …here!' The Doctor stretched the cotton from one spot to the next. 'Hold it there, will you, Jo?'

Jo obeyed.

'Now if we assume that the Master is making more or less straight for his destination, which is all we can assume, if he continues on this route, it will take him....'

Muttering to himself, the Doctor stretched out the thread in a continuing straight line. Suddenly he leaped to his feet.

'Great jumping Jehoshaphat, I'm a fool! Of course! Where else would he be making for? I need a helicopter right away!'

Captain Hart looked as if he was feeling even more sympathy with the Brigadier.

'Certainly, Doctor. Perhaps you'd be good enough to tell me your destination?'

'Yes, come on, Doctor, where are we going?' demanded Jo.

'Somewhere you know very well, Jo – a little place called Devil's End!'

CHAPTER 7

DEVIL'S END

The village of Devil's End had changed surprisingly little since the time when the Master had occupied the post of Vicar there.

True, after the recent, terrifying events quite a few villagers had moved away, especially those who had temporarily fallen under the Master's sway. There was no congregation left now for the little church, and no vicar either. In fact, there was no longer a church. It had been blown to smithereens – an unfortunate side-effect of the destruction of an almost all-powerful alien being called Azal.

The Master had tried to take control of Azal's powers for his own purposes. The attempt had been frustrated by the Doctor and had led to the Master's capture and imprisonment.

Now the Master smiled as he remembered the Doctor's promise to 'deal with him later.' He also remembered his own mocking reply:'You always were an optimist, Doctor!' And here he was again, free at last – free to deal with the Doctor.

He drove along the side of the picturesque village green, heading for the heap of rubble that had once been an equally picturesque church. The church's destruction meant nothing to the Master. What interested him was the cavern beneath.

The village of Devil's End had long been associated with legends of black magic and witchcraft. In the seventeenth

century Matthew Hopkins, the Witchfinder-General had exposed a coven of witches in the village, and they had all been burned at the stake.

In the early nineteenth century, the young and dissolute Lord Aldbourne had built upon village tradition with his own version of the famous Hell Fire Club. Here in the cavern he and his fellow rakes had played at devil worship, aided by doxies imported from London and copious supplies of claret topped up with laudanum – a ferocious mixture of opium and brandy. Not surprisingly, they'd frightened themselves into fits.

In more recent times an enterprising parish council had converted the cavern into a sort of witchcraft museum, lining the walls with eerily-lit tableaux showing witches at their evil ceremonies. Others were shown being interrogated by the Witchfinder-General, tortured into confession or burned at the stake.

It wasn't exactly the Chamber of Horrors, or the London Dungeon, but the little exhibition had made a modest contribution to church funds. 'A case of evil serving good,' Canon Smallwood, the old vicar, used to say. That, of course, was before the Master murdered him, buried him in his own churchyard and took his place.

For a time the Master had successfully combined the role of vicar with that of Magister, or Chief Warlock, of a newly revived coven of witches, using the psychic energy generated by the Coven to contact Azal. Everything had been going well – until the Doctor had turned up to spoil things.

The Master parked the car outside the church, climbed out, and stood surveying the ruins. All that was left were the shattered remains of the tower and a few broken walls.

To the Master's relief the entrance to the cavern, in what had once been the vestry, had been cleared of rubble. There was a noticeboard by the entrance.

CAVERN CLOSED. DANGER. DO NOT ENTER.

The Master took off the car-coat, the cap and the muffling scarf and threw them into the back of the car.

Then, ignoring the sign he made his way down into the cavern, unaware that he was being observed from the other side of the village green.

The watcher was tall and bony with drawn-back black hair streaked with grey. She wore a brocade dress and a long black cloak in some handwoven material. A heavy Celtic cross hung at her neck.

Miss Olive Hawthorne was not only a fine specimen of the English maiden lady, she was also the village witch – a white witch of course, using her magic powers, in which she firmly believed, only for good.

She had been suspicious of the new vicar from the first and had helped the Doctor and his UNIT friends to bring about the man's downfall. She remembered seeing the Reverend Mr Magister being driven away under heavy guard in an army jeep. He was, she had gathered, a master criminal with a long string of crimes to his name, destined to spend the rest of his life in a maximum security prison. So what was he doing back in Devil's End?

'Up to no good, that's for sure!' muttered Miss Hawthorne, and hurried across the green.

At the bottom of the steps the Master stood surveying the cavern. Some of the actual roof had been blown away and the place was dimly lit by shafts of daylight. The wax

figures in the gruesome tableaux were broken and scattered, but the altar-like Stone of Sacrifice still stood in the centre of the cavern.

When the little museum had been in full working order, it had never been really scary at all. Now in its semi-darkness and desolation, with the wind howling through the broken roof, there was something really sinister about it.

Not that this bothered the Master, of course. He had eyes only for the Stone of Sacrifice. Making his way over to it, he put out his hands and leaned on the stone, relishing the faint tingle of power.

A voice from the doorway called, 'Mr Magister!'

The Master whirled round and saw Miss Hawthorne striding down the steps towards him. He gave a wolfish smile.

'Miss Hawthorne! Such a pleasure to see an old friend again.'

'I'm no friend of yours, as well you know, you *evil* man!'

The Master raised his hands in mock protest. 'Really, Miss Hawthorne, is that the way to address your vicar? What was it you called me? "A rationalist, existentialist priest"!'

'You're no priest,' said Miss Hawthorne. 'You brought death to this village – and the destruction of our lovely old church.'

'You must blame that on your friend the Doctor, Miss Hawthorne. If he hadn't interfered with my plans for Azal –'

'What are you doing back in Devil's End?'

'Leaving, dear lady. That's the only reason I returned to this miserable hamlet – to leave it.' Suddenly there was a squat gun-like device in the Master's hand. 'But I shall settle with you first – you interfering old besom!'

He raised the device, and then paused as the stuttering

roar of a helicopter drifted down through the gaps in the roof.

'The Doctor!' he cried exultantly.

'How can you be so sure?'

'Who else could it be? He finally managed to work out where I must be making for. Now I can say goodbye to another old friend!'

The naval helicopter touched down on the village green and the tall figure of the Third Doctor jumped out, ducking to avoid the still-turning rotor blades.

He turned to help Jo Grant down, and nodded to the pilot.

'Thank you very much. If you could just wait here for a while? We shouldn't be very long.'

'Shouldn't I come with you, sir? If this man's as dangerous as they say – '

'No need, old chap. He's probably gone by now, but we'd better just check.'

'Take this, then.' The pilot held out a massive revolver.

'Certainly not,' said the Doctor. 'I don't approve of guns – nasty dangerous things.'

'I'll have it,' said Jo, firmly, taking the gun before hurrying after the Doctor who was already striding towards the ruined church.

Pausing by the Ford Cortina, the Doctor put a hand on the bonnet.

'Still warm, so somebody's just arrived.'

Jo pointed through the windscreen. Something was dangling from the driving mirror. It seemed to be a little manikin, a tiny replica of a tubby, red-faced, fair-haired man. The features of the grotesque little dummy were twisted in horror.

'What a weird little thing,' said Jo. 'Maybe it's a replica of the owner.'

The Doctor studied the manikin and shook his head. 'I'm rather afraid it *is* the owner, Jo,' he said grimly. 'The Master must have his little joke. Come on!'

He headed for the entrance to the cavern, with Jo hurrying after him.

As they ran down the steps a voice called, 'Doctor, look out!'

They stopped. There was the Master. He was standing close to the Stone of Sacrifice, covering Miss Hawthorne with a sinister black weapon, his Tissue Compression Eliminator.

'Come on down, Doctor,' he called. 'You too Miss Grant. And don't attempt to use that revolver, or it will be the worse for your friend Miss Hawthorne.'

They continued slowly down the cavern steps, and halted just before the Stone of Sacrifice.

The Master's laugh echoed around the ruined cavern. 'You're just in time to say goodbye, Doctor. I fear it will be your final farewell. I think I'll hang you on my TARDIS control panel as a souvenir!'

The Doctor nodded towards the stone. 'Is that it?'

'Naturally. My TARDIS is in full working order.'

'I wish I could say the same. My dematerialisation circuit is useless.'

'Ah yes, the Time Lord sentence of exile. Now I'm free and you're the prisoner. Never mind, Doctor, your exile is about to end. Look upon it as a happy release!'

Suddenly Miss Hawthorne raised her voice in an eerie chant: 'Avaunt, ye evil spirit, creature of death and darkness. Avaunt, I say! Begone!'

The Master chuckled. "That stupid mumbo-jumbo will do you no good, you foolish woman. I'm immune to spells. Besides, you've forgotten your broomstick and your pointed hat!'

Suddenly a rushing wind sprang up inside the cavern. It seemed to be a kind of miniature whirlwind, directed at the Master alone. Step by step it forced him back until he was flattened helplessly on top of the stone.

Jo brought up her revolver in a two-handed grip, covering him.

'Quick, Doctor, get that gun thing in his hand!'

As the Doctor sprang forward, the Master snarled and scrabbled furiously at the surface of the Stone of Sacrifice. All at once his body seemed to sink, and he disappeared from view.

Seconds later there came a harsh roaring, grinding sound and the Stone of Sacrifice itself faded away.

Miss Hawthorne turned to the Doctor. 'Magic, Doctor?' she asked with simple pride.

Science or magic. It was an old dispute between them.

The Doctor smiled. 'Magic, Miss Hawthorne!'

Later, when they'd said their goodbyes and were heading back to UNIT HQ in the helicopter, Jo leaned closer to the Doctor, raising her voice above the roar of the engines.

'So Miss Hawthorne really is a witch after all!'

'Nonsense, she's no such thing.'

'So how did she summon up that wind and disappear the Master?'

'I think the wind was an example of latent telekinetic powers emerging in a crisis. A sort of controlled, benevolent poltergeist.'

'You agreed it was magic.'

'I didn't want to spoil things for Miss Hawthorne!'

'What about the disappearing?'

'*She* didn't disappear the Master.'

'Who disappeared him then?'

'He did it himself. The Stone of Sacrifice was really his TARDIS.'

'I thought they all looked like police boxes!'

'The TARDIS has something called a chameleon circuit, Jo. It's supposed to be able to disguise itself, blend in with its surroundings. Mine got stuck as a police box on a visit to London – back in 1963 I think it was. I never got round to repairing it.'

The Doctor sighed. 'Hardly seems worth bothering now. It might as well be a police box for all the use it is to me!'

'Cheer up, Doctor. At least we've got rid of the Master.'

The Doctor nodded. 'As he himself put it, he's free and I'm the prisoner.'

He spent the rest of the journey in gloomy silence.

Brigadier Alistair Lethbridge-Stewart, Commanding Officer of the United Kingdom section of the United Nations Intelligence Taskforce, gathered up a bulky file of questions, complaints and outraged protests about the conduct of his Scientific Adviser. Tucking it under his arm, he marched along hushed UNIT corridors towards the Doctor's laboratory.

On the way he stuck his head into the orderly room, where a burly young sergeant was manning a communications set up, drinking tea and eating a corned-beef sandwich, all more or less at the same time. At the sight of the Brigadier, he stood up, hurriedly putting down his

plate and cup on the desk and spilling his tea in the process.

'Don't let me interrupt you, Sergeant Benton,' said the Brigadier. 'What news of the Doctor?'

'Expected any moment, sir. He and Miss Grant are on their way back by naval helicopter.

'From Portsmouth, presumably?'

'No, sir, from Devil's End.'

'What the blazes is he doing there?'

'No idea, sir. Shall I tell him you want to see him when he arrives?'

'Certainly not, Sergeant. Do that and he'll disappear again. I'll deal with the Doctor myself.'

'Good luck, sir,' said Sergeant Benton impassively.

The Brigadier gave him a quizzical look, cleared his throat and went on his way.

Although UNIT'S involvement in the Sea Devils affair had been minimal, UNIT HQ in Geneva was still going to demand a full report, and the Brigadier knew who was going to end up writing it.

He was going to get some answers from the Doctor, first, though, and since the Doctor hated answering questions and refused pointblank to write reports, the Brigadier had decided to ambush him. When the Doctor arrived, the Brigadier and his files would be waiting.

He'd expected the laboratory to be empty, so he was surprised to see a tall figure on the far side of the long room, gazing at a handsome grandfather clock. The Brigadier couldn't recall ever seeing the clock before. Perhaps the Doctor had brought it home as a souvenir.

'Doctor!' he called.

The figure swung round and the Brigadier saw that it wasn't the Doctor at all.

Or was it?

The clothes were similar, old-fashioned and vaguely Edwardian. But the longish hair was brown, not white, and the handsome face was that of a much younger man. Though there was a certain resemblance, especially about the nose…

An unnerving thought struck the Brigadier. He had been forced to admit once already that the Doctor's appearance had changed.

Had it changed again?

'Doctor?' he repeated, tentatively this time.

To his horror, the stranger said, 'Yes?'

CHAPTER 8

OLD FRIENDS

The Brigadier reeled, his worst fears confirmed.

'You really *are* the Doctor? You've changed again?'

'I suppose I have. It's Colonel Lethbridge-Stewart, isn't it?'

'Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart. If you're the Doctor, you must know that!'

'Been promoted, have you? Congratulations! Well deserved, I'm sure. I remember you did terribly well in that nasty business with the Intelligence – Yeti in the Underground and all that. Frightful business.'

The Brigadier struggled to stay calm. 'Where's Miss Grant?'

The stranger looked puzzled. 'I'm afraid I haven't the pleasure.'

'You don't know Miss Grant, you don't know my current rank, yet you claim to be my Scientific Adviser.

'Forgive me, I haven't claimed any such thing.'

'But if you're the Doctor…'

Suddenly the stranger smiled. 'Let's just say that I'm *a* Doctor. There's more than one, you know. Clearly, I'm not the one you were expecting.'

'Ah!' said the Brigadier.

It had never really occurred to him that the Doctor was anything other than unique, that somewhere in the universe there could be others like him.

'You're a friend of the Doctor's, then?' he said. 'A colleague?' He looked at the curiously familiar face. 'Perhaps even a relative?'

'Yes!' said the stranger comprehensively. 'We're very close.'

The Brigadier decided not to ask how the fellow had gained entrance to UNIT HQ. Presumably any close connection of the Doctor's might well share his peculiar powers.

'We're expecting the Doctor at any moment,' he said. 'I'm sure he'll be glad to see you.'

'I'm not!' said the newcomer. 'Last time we met he was downright hostile!'

The Brigadier nodded sympathetically. 'He can be pretty tetchy at times. I've had quite a bit of trouble with him myself.'

'I'm very sorry to hear that,' said the stranger solemnly. 'Permit me to apologise on his behalf.'

'Oh, nothing really serious,' said the Brigadier hastily. 'He's given me a good deal of invaluable help. Don't know how I'd manage without him.'

'You're very kind.'

They heard the clattering roar of an approaching helicopter.

'That'll be the Doctor now,' said the Brigadier.

The roar grew ever louder, and then dwindled to a steady idling sound as the machine landed. They heard the helicopter take off again, slowly fading into the distance, and then minutes later brisk footsteps were coming down the corridor. The Third Doctor appeared in the doorway, with Jo just behind him.

'Sorry to be late, Brigadier,' he began, and then broke off at the sight of the Doctor, standing by the window. 'Oh no! Not you again.'

Time froze, leaving Jo and the Brigadier like statues.

The Third Doctor strode into the laboratory and

confronted his later self. 'Well, I took your advice,' he said bitterly. 'Back on the planet of the War Games, remember? And look what it got me. Exile!'

He pointed to the blue police box in the corner. 'That thing's useless to me now! The dematerialisation circuit doesn't function and the Time Lords have taken away my knowledge of Time Travel theory…'

The Doctor ignored the angry tirade. Fixing his eyes on the Third Doctor, he opened his mind to the link between them and the two minds became one.

Memories flooded back. The second Doctor's trial, regeneration and exile to Earth. Autons, Eocenes, Martian astronauts… The disastrous Inferno project – an entire world dying in flames, with nothing he could do… More Autons, aided by the Master. The deadly Keller machine, the beautiful and treacherous Axons, beleaguered colonists in space, the terrifying Azal and, inevitably, his old enemies the Daleks. He saw the gloomy caverns of Peladon and heard the roar of the sacred beast.

Finally, still fresh in the Third Doctor's mind, he saw the struggle with the Sea Devils, and the escape of the Master. Above all, he sensed the Third Doctor's burning resentment of his exile, his passionate desire to be free again at any cost. And something else was happening…

What was it the First Doctor had said?

'With most of the gaps filled in, the remaining barriers will start to crumble…'

Just as the First Doctor had predicted, other memories were starting to come back. Memories from the Doctor's past that were still in the Third Doctor's future. Somewhere in the depths of his mind giant spiders scuttled in darkness…

'Your exile certainly hasn't been dull,' he said.

'Oh, I've done some useful work,' said the Third Doctor grudgingly. 'As the Tribunal said, Earth seems particularly vulnerable to alien attack.'

'You've even had a couple of trips off-planet,' said the Doctor encouragingly.

'Only to be yanked back to Earth – like a pet dog on an extra-long leash!'

'Be patient,' urged the Doctor. 'Your exile will not last forever. One day the Time Lords will relent.'

'When? Perhaps my entire life will be spent as an exile on this planet. Perhaps only my next regeneration will be free.'

'No,' said the Doctor firmly. 'You, as your present self, will one day regain your freedom. You will revisit Earth, but it will be by your own free choice.'

'How do you know that? You have only the memories I've been able to give you – my memories up to this moment.'

'That's not entirely true,' said the Doctor. 'All my memories are still there, dormant in my mind. The more I can restore like this, the more of the others will come to life.'

The Third Doctor stood for a moment, stroking his chin. 'So you know what will happen to me? How I will end?'

'Not in any detail,' said the Doctor. 'Nor would I tell you if I did. But I can tell you this – you will end this regeneration by your own choice – in a noble cause.'

'But not just yet, I trust?'

'Not for some considerable time.'

'I'm very glad to hear it!'

The air began to shimmer and the Third Doctor said, 'You'd better be off, old chap, before they see you.'

'There's no great hurry. I've already met the Brigadier. He thinks I'm some kind of relative of yours!'

Time resumed its flow and the Brigadier said, 'Ah there you are, Doctor, Miss Grant.There's a visitor for you Doctor, an old friend I gather.'

The Doctor – *his* Doctor – gave the visitor a polite nod. Was there an edge of sarcasm in his greeting?

'What an unexpected pleasure! How are you?'

'All the better for seeing you, Doctor,' said the visitor.

'I gather you've already met the Brigadier. Allow me to present my assistant, Miss Josephine Grant.'

Jo Grant gave the visitor her most bewitching smile.

'Pleased to meet you.'

She held out her hand. The visitor took it and kissed it, and held it for a moment..

He was, thought Jo Grant, decidedly dishy.

'You know, I feel we're old friends already,' he said .

'Of course you are,' said the Doctor. 'No need to make a meal of it, old chap!' He sounded resentful, almost jealous.

Sensing a certain tension in the atmosphere, the Brigadier cleared his throat. 'Come along, Miss Grant, you can give me a preliminary report.' He turned to the Doctor. 'I expect you two have a lot to talk about. I'd appreciate a word when you're free.'

'Very well, Brigadier, very well. I'll do my homework and give you a full report.'

The Brigadier raised an eyebrow and led Jo away.

'The Doctor seems in an odd mood,' he said, as they walked towards his office.

Jo nodded. 'He's been a bit down lately. The Master escaping again upset him. Maybe his visitor will cheer him up.'

'Let's hope so. Seemed a pleasant enough young fellow.'

'He certainly did,' said Jo. 'It's a funny thing, but what he said was quite right. The moment he took my hand, I felt as if I'd known him for ages…'

In the laboratory, the Doctor was still trying to persuade his earlier self to take a more cheerful view of his exile.

'Interesting work, pleasant surroundings, charming colleagues…'

'Oh, it's all very comfortable – as prisons go,' said the Third Doctor bitterly.

'Come now – '

'Don't you understand? Surely I haven't changed that much! I'm a Time Lord. The freedom to travel in space and time is the whole point of my existence! Without it, I'm less than myself.'

'That at least I can understand,' said the Doctor. 'I too am less than myself – than all my selves at the moment. It's not a very pleasant sensation.'

'Perhaps so, but you've still got your freedom. Do you realise what a torment to me it is to see yourTARDIS – my TARDIS – standing there, taunting me?'

The Doctor frowned. 'Standing where?'

The Third Doctor pointed to the handsome grandfather clock. 'I see you've even managed to restore the chameleon circuit.'

'No, I haven't. My TARDIS still looks like a police box – it's standing just outside in the grounds.'

The two Doctors looked at each other, and then at the grandfather clock.

'That clock wasn't here when I left,' said the Third Doctor slowly. 'It certainly isn't mine – and if it isn't yours, whose is it?'

A door opened in the clock's polished casing.

'Mine, Doctor,' said the Master, stepping out of the clock, the Tissue Compression Eliminator in his hand. 'Did you really think I would give up so easily?'

The Master and the Third Doctor confronted each other.

'I told you earlier, Doctor, there's nothing wrong with my TARDIS,' the Master went on. 'The chameleon circuit is in perfect working order. I knew the co-ordinates for this place. If you remember, I've been here before.'

'Attempting to murder me with the help of a Nestene-animated telephone flex. Oh yes, I remember!'

The Master chuckled. 'You must allow me my little amusements, Doctor. But this time the joke's over.' He raised the Eliminator.

'You're not worried by the presence of a witness?'

The Third Doctor nodded towards the tall, long-haired young man at his side.

The Master gave the stranger a scornful look. 'One of your human assistants, Doctor?'

'He isn't an assistant, exactly – and he isn't human either. Look again! Open your mind.'

The Master studied the tall young man. Their minds touched, and the Master's eyes widened in shock. 'They would never permit it. It isn't possible!'

'Oh but it is!' said the Doctor. 'Hardly fair is it, two against one?'

For a moment the Master's concentration wavered as he grappled with the concept of two Doctors present in the same time zone.

Suddenly the Doctor sprang forward and grabbed at the Eliminator. They grappled for a moment, then the Doctor twisted the Master's wrist and the Tissue Compression

Eliminator clattered to the floor. The Third Doctor snatched it up, just as a savage shove from the Master sent the Doctor staggering back. He cannoned into his other self and almost fell.

The Master was already disappearing into his TARDIS. The Third Doctor raised the Eliminator and aimed it at the Master's back, but he didn't fire.

The Master vanished inside the grandfather clock. With a groaning, grinding sound, the clock faded away.

The Third Doctor looked at the Doctor and shrugged, slipping the Eliminator into his pocket.

'I know,' said the Doctor. 'We were never too keen on killing, were we? And who wants a miniature Master for a souvenir?' The Brigadier and Jo Grant came hurrying into the laboratory.

The Brigadier registered the Third Doctor's presence with relief, glancing quickly at the police box in the corner.

'We heard this sound… I thought you'd left us, Doctor.'

'I can't leave, Brigadier, you know that.'

'But I must,' said the Doctor. 'Brigadier, Miss Grant…

A great pleasure to meet you again. Perhaps you'll see me off the premises, Doctor?'

'With pleasure,' said the Third Doctor.

Before Jo or the Brigadier could reply, the two Doctors hurried away.

The Doctor's TARDIS stood in a quiet corner of the grounds. Strange, he thought, that there should be two TARDISes, so close together in the same time zone. But was it any stranger than the presence of two Doctors?

Not, of course, that there really were two TARDISes – or two Doctors either, come to that. All very paradoxical.

He fished the key from his pocket and turned to say goodbye.

The Third Doctor was staring fixedly at the police box, the Master's Tissue Compression Eliminator back in his hand.

'That's my TARDIS,' he said fiercely. *'Mine!'*

'No, it isn't,' said the Doctor gently. 'It will be one day – but not yet.'

'What's to stop me from taking it now?'

'You'd be stealing your own future!'

'What's wrong with that? At least I'd be sure of having one. Tell you what, since you seem so keen on it, you can stay on here and serve out my exile.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'That would be paradox upon paradox. No, I can't do that. And I can't hand over my TARDIS.'

'I could make you!'

The Doctor glanced at the Eliminator. 'With that? I don't think so. After all, it would be a sort of suicide. And if you didn't use it on the Master, you'd scarcely use it on me.'

'Don't be too sure! I might do it just to prove you wrong!'

'I know you won't do it,' said the Doctor. 'Because you didn't…'

Even as he spoke the Doctor realised that what he said wasn't necessarily true. By his very presence he was already altering time. Who knew how much more things might change, perhaps for the worse?

The Third Doctor picked up the doubt in his mind and smiled grimly. 'Exactly! Now you're here, anything can happen!'

He stood there for a moment, toying with the Eliminator, looking longingly at the TARDIS.

He looked at the Doctor.

The Doctor met his gaze.

'Well, make up your mind. Are you going to do it or not?'

The Third Doctor smiled wryly.

'You're right, of course. Much as I'm tempted, I can't do it – any more than you could.' He tossed the Eliminator to the Doctor.

'A souvenir for you! Goodbye – and good luck.'

'Goodbye,' said the Doctor. 'Remember, you already have your place in Time Lord history. My future is still in considerable doubt.'

He raised a hand in farewell and vanished inside the TARDIS.

Moments later, the Third Doctor heard the heartbreakingly familiar wheezing groaning sound as the TARDIS faded away. He stood staring into space for a moment. Then, drawing a deep breath, he turned and went back into UNIT HQ.

Jo and the Brigadier were waiting for him, and there was work to do.

CHAPTER 9

INTERLUDES

The Doctor stood at the TARDIS console, his hands spread like those of a concert pianist, about to commence some great concerto. He was a very different Doctor from the one who had staggered into the control room after the Master's booby trap. Some of his identity, and much of his confidence, had been restored to him. But there was still a long way to go, and he was far from being in control of his own destiny.

He closed his eyes and waited to see where – and when – the TARDIS would take him next.

His hands began moving over the controls.

President Flavia stared thoughtfully at the tempograph on the giant monitor screen. As before, it showed seven blue segments of varying lengths and one shorter red one. Light traces showed that the red segment had curved back to touch the first, second and third segments in turn. It was now moving towards the fourth.

'As you see, Madam President,' said Chief Temporal Technician Volnar fussily, 'the pattern continues. The Doctor has interacted with his first, second and third incarnations –'

'– and is now heading for the fourth,' concluded Flavia coldly. 'Since nothing has changed, why have you sent for me?'

'Your pardon, Madam President, something has changed. The screen shows the situation until very recently. Then this happened.'

Volnar touched a control and the pattern changed. For a time the red segment continued to move towards the fourth blue one, then it disappeared altogether from the screen.

'Well?' snapped President Flavia. 'What does this mean?'

'I am not sure, Madam President,' said Volnar miserably.

'Is the Doctor dead?'

'It is possible, Madam President. Or perhaps he has somehow gone beyond the range of the temporal scanning equipment.'

'Is that possible?'

'Theoretically, Madam President. I could check the manuals and the archives.'

'Do so. Let me know when you have something to report.'

As she made her way back to her office, Flavia's mind was filled with the image of the red segment blinking out of existence.

Had the Doctor too ceased to exist?

CHAPTER 10

VAMPIRES

In the middle of a crowded circular chamber, inside a dome in the forest, two very different figures sat on plasti-steel packing cases, sipping rough red wine from tarnished silver goblets.

One was a very tall man with a tangle of curly hair and wide, inquisitive eyes. He wore loose, comfortable clothes coordinated in rich burgundy. An impossibly long scarf was wound around his neck. A battered broad-brimmed soft hat was jammed on the back of his head.

By contrast, the young woman beside him was small, neatly dressed and thoroughly composed. She had fair hair, a high-domed forehead and, quite unconsciously, a haughtily superior, aristocratic air.

The man was the Doctor, now in his fourth incarnation. The girl was the Lady Romanadvoratrelundar, Romana for short, the Doctor's Time Lady travelling companion.

The Fourth Doctor took a long swig of his wine and looked around the crowded chamber. It was filled with rebels, some cheerfully celebrating, others having their wounds dressed, looking for old friends and engaging in eager discussions about the new and brighter future now that the Vampire Lords had been slain.

'The only thing sadder than a battle lost,' said the Doctor, 'is a battle won. Old Wellington said that to me, just after Waterloo. He was quite right.'

Romana frowned. 'That doesn't seem terribly logical.'

'Perhaps not. But it makes a lot of sense all the same.'

Once the excitement of the fighting faded away, thought the Doctor, and the tumult and the shouting were over, you were left with a curious feeling of let-down.

The Fourth Doctor had just survived one of the most terrifying adventures of his life – of all his lives. Caught in a hole in the fabric of space, the TARDIS had been drawn into E-Space, a smaller universe that exists parallel to our own. There it had landed on an apparently idyllic planet called Alzarius – which had turned out to be no such thing.

Leaving Alzarius, the Doctor, Romana, a dog-like mobile computer called K9 and a stowaway Alzarian lad called Adric had all landed on a bleak and inhospitable planet with a horrible secret at its heart.

Terrified villagers, leading a medieval-type life of poverty and oppression, were under the sway of their immortal masters, the Three Who Rule, who lived in the tower that dominated the village.

It hadn't taken the Doctor and Romana long to discover that the Three – King Zargo, Queen Camilla and Aukon, their High Priest – were vampires.

Worse still, they were servants of the Great Vampire, sole survivor of an evil race with whom the Time Lords had once fought a long and bloody war.

Wounded and almost dying, the Great Vampire had fled into E-Space, somehow drawing after it a cargo liner called the *Hydrax*. The original *Hydrax* crew, Zargo, Camilla, and Aukon, had been vampirised and used the powers this gave them to rule the terrified peasants. They took an annual cull of the young people of the village, draining their blood and using it to feed the Great Vampire, who lay, slowly recovering his awesome powers, beneath the tower

– which was, in fact, the *Hydrax* itself.

When the Doctor and his friends had arrived, the Great Vampire had been about to arise once more, ready to invade the universe with a swarm of vampire disciples. The Doctor had put an end to this scheme, initially by leading an army of rebels to attack the tower, and ultimately by destroying the Great Vampire itself, using one of the *Hydrax*'s scout ships as a metal stake to shatter the giant monster's heart. With the evil force that sustained them destroyed, the Three had crumbled to dust.

Now the Doctor and Romana were back in the forest dome that was rebel HQ.

Adric, the young stowaway was asleep inside the TARDIS, exhausted by his recent adventures. K9 was also in the TARDIS, busily trying to compute a method of leaving E-Space and re-entering normal space.

The rebel dome was actually the interior of a hollowed-out mound, its walls reinforced with wooden pillars and sheets of rusting metal. The circular room was filled with an amazing jumble of partly dismantled machinery and miscellaneous scientific equipment.

During their long reign the Three had outlawed all science and technology, determined to keep their subjects in a dark age of ignorance. In the process of converting the *Hydrax* from a grounded space-ship into a tower they had ripped out the engines, computers, stores and supplies and all its communications equipment, abandoning it deep in the forest.

Old Kalmar, leader of the rebels had ordered his followers to gather up all the abandoned technological equipment they could find, in the hope of rediscovering lost knowledge. Everything had been stored here in the dome.

The Doctor had called the place it a *teknacothaka*, a word, Romana strongly suspected, he had simply made up because he liked the sound of it.

In the aftermath of the battle, rebel HQ – now government HQ – was busier than ever. The frail, white-bearded Kalmar and the burly Ivo, the two surviving leaders, were surrounded by delegates eagerly discussing what must be done next.

Tarak, their young commander, had been killed in the attack on the tower and arrangements were being discussed for a state funeral and some suitable memorial. And that was only the first of the problems to be tackled. After that there was a whole new system of administration to be set up, not only for the village but for the surrounding countryside as well. The Three were gone, but they had spread the taint of their evil far around.

Kalmar broke off from the group and came over to them.

'Forgive me, Doctor, but could you give us your wise counsel? There is so much to be decided.'

'You'll have to learn to make your own decisions now,' said the Doctor. 'My friends and I will soon be leaving.'

'We realise that, Doctor,' said Kalmar. 'But while you are still here…'

'Oh, very well,' said the Doctor. 'Forgive me, Romana. I'll only be a minute or two.' He followed Kalmar across to the arguing group.

Romana reflected that there didn't seem to be much demand for her wise counsel. There was no escape from male chauvinism it seemed, not even in E-Space. She was about to return to the TARDIS and go to bed when someone touched her shyly on the arm.

'My lady?'

Romana turned and saw a young peasant woman, a thin and pale-faced creature wrapped in a ragged shawl.

'My lady, is there one called the Doctor here?'

Romana pointed across the dome to where the Doctor was lecturing a group of respectful rebel leaders.

'You've got to maintain a state of constant readiness,' he was saying. 'Vampires are notoriously hard to kill and there may still be others lurking in hiding. Every man must keep a sharpened stake to hand – in fact, what you need here is a stakeholder's economy!'

'He's over there,' said Romana. 'But I'm afraid he's very busy.' She saw that the woman was listening to the Doctor's words with horrified fascination. No doubt the fear of the vampire was still very fresh in her mind. 'Can I help?'

'I fear not, my lady. My child is sick with the marsh fever.I was told that there was a wise Doctor here. She is near to death and he is our only hope.'

Romana thought for a moment. Like most Time Lords of her rank she was multi-qualified. She would be quite as much use as the Doctor – very probably more.

'Wait here a moment.'

She went over to the nearest rebel, a skinny lad with a mop of curly hair who embarrassed her by promptly falling on one knee. 'How may I serve you, my lady?'

'Have you any medical stores in this collection of yours? Among the things you salvaged from the spaceship, I mean.'

He stared blankly at her and Romana added, 'They'd probably be marked with a red cross.'

The boy's face brightened. 'Yes, my lady, there are such things. Kalmar ordered all of them to be stored together in one place.'

He led her to another part of the dome where Romana

found the neatly stacked remains of what must have been a well-equipped ship's hospital. To her delight they included a sealed box with a carrying handle and a red cross on the lid. It turned out to be a basic medikit.

Romana checked the drugs and dressings. She could certainly find something here to bring down a simple fever.

She turned to the boy. 'Thank you – what's your name?'

'Xan, my lady.'

'Thank you, Xan, you've been most helpful. This is exactly what I need.'

She went back to the peasant woman who was gazing about her in timid astonishment. 'Come along, then!'

'My lady?'

'Take me to your child. I'm pretty sure I can help.'

'But I came to seek the Doctor, my lady.'

Romana was getting tired of being taken for useless simply because she was female.

'Well you won't get him for hours, if at all. I'm a doctor as well, and I can help you as much as he can.'

The woman looked at her with a sort of peasant cunning. 'Are you the Doctor's woman, my lady?'

Romana smiled. 'Not exactly, but we're very good friends. We come from the same – from the same country and we have been travelling companions for some time. Now, do you want me to help your child or not? A few hours could make all the difference.'

The woman thought for a moment. Romana could almost see her mind grappling with the problem.

Finally she said, 'If you will follow me, my lady,' and led Romana out of the dome and into the dark forest.

Caught up in a heated discussion as to whether a column or a statue would commemorate the late Tarak best, the

Doctor didn't even see her go.

The journey took far longer than Romana had expected, but she strode along without complaint. The peasant woman scurried ahead along the narrow forest paths, her head shrouded in her shawl.

Once or twice Romana asked if they were getting any nearer to their destination.

'Just a little further, my lady,' came the unvarying reply.

It was dark and sinister in the woods at night. The trees closed in overhead so that the paths became tunnels. Occasionally a clearing gave a glimpse of a pale moon in a sky full of dark clouds. Romana kept thinking she heard a sort of stealthy, scuttling movement in the bushes. She had a curious feeling that she was being watched…

She seemed to catch glimpses of dark figures flitting through the trees always just at the edge of her vision, but when she turned to look they were gone. Telling herself not to be childish, she marched on.

They came at last to a low rambling building crouched in a gloomy hollow. A gravel drive led up to a heavy, metal-studded front door. The roof was crowded with chimneys and crooked turrets. The place was a substantial manor house, not at all the peasant hut Romana had expected.

She turned to her companion. 'Is this where you live?'

'Yes, my lady.'The peasant woman saw the surprise on Romana's face and went on. 'This is the House of Zarn, my lady. Master Zarn owns the land for miles around. I'm a kitchen-maid here. Master Zarn gave me permission to leave the estate and go to seek the Doctor.'

'Kind of him,' said Romana drily. 'Where is the child?'

'In my room, my lady. We must go around the back.'

She led Romana away from the imposing facade of the house to a yard at the back. It was filled with a clutter of wooden outbuildings, some of them actually built on to the house.

The woman rapped on an arched wooden door. After a moment it opened, revealing a figure with a lantern who looked at Romana in surprise and then at the peasant woman. 'Hurda, who is this? You were sent to fetch –'

'Let us in, Master, and I shall explain all,' said the woman. There was fear in her voice.

After a moment the man stood aside, beckoning them to enter.

Romana found herself in a shadowy, stone-flagged kitchen. It contained a massive wooden table and heavy wooden chairs, and there was a fireplace with a cooking range on one side. Hams and cheeses hung from the rafters in the ceiling.

The man with the lantern was stocky and hard-faced. He had a neatly trimmed beard and wore a leather jerkin with a short sword in the belt.

Ignoring Romana, he hung the lantern on a hook in one of the ceiling beams and turned to the peasant woman.

'Well? Where is the Doctor?'

'He was surrounded by rebels, Master. I could not reach him.'

'Then why bring her? What use is she to us?'

'She offered to come, Master. She is a friend of the Doctor.'

The man frowned. 'Is she his woman?'

'She says not, Master Zarn. But she is his travelling companion, they are of the same people. No doubt he cares for her.'

The stocky man studied Romana. 'It may yet serve. You have done well, Hurda.'

'Thank you, Master. And my child?'

'Speak to my head guard. Tell him I said the child may live.'

Romana was getting increasingly suspicious – and increasingly angry. 'You told me there was a sick child here. Where is she?'

'I am sorry my lady,' said Hurda. 'I lied to you.'

'Why did you do this?' demanded Romana. 'I came here to help you and you reward me by leading me into some kind of trap. Is your child ill or not?'

'My child is not sick, my lady, but her life was in danger all the same. That much was true.'

'Why was she in danger?'

'Master Zarn's guards took her. He said they would have her blood unless I brought the Doctor here.' The woman then hurried away, disappearing through an inner door.

Romana looked around, noticing that there was nobody between her and the door to the outside. 'Apparently I have been brought here under false pretenses,' she said. 'I shall leave at once.'

'You will stay,' said Zarn flatly.

Romana sprang for the door, but it opened before she could reach it. It was filled by a little group of black-cloaked figures. Somehow Romana knew that these were the dark figures who had followed her through the forest.

There were both men and women in the group. They were of different ages and sizes, but all of them were thin and whitefaced, with burning eyes and claw-like hands. They had something else in common as well – an air of dreadful, ravening hunger.

She turned back to Zarn and saw then the same hunger in his face. He smiled, revealing long sharp fangs.

As the newcomers flooded into the room – there seemed to be at least a dozen of them – Romana realised that the Doctor's warnings had been well founded.

Zargo, Camilla and Aukon hadn't been the only vampires on the planet after all...

CHAPTER 11

THE VAMPIRE MUTATION

'Where's Romana?' asked the Doctor.

After much heated debate the rebel leaders had decided that a simple column somewhere in the village would be the most suitable memorial for Tarak – largely because nobody had the skill to carve a statue. The arts on the vampire planet were still in a very primitive state.

Some of the more radical – and more economical – delegates had even been in favour of simply renaming the communal dining hall in Tarak's honour. Ivo, who ran the hall was opposed to this. He had plans to make the hall into a village inn – a welcoming place where people would come to eat and drink because they wanted to, not because it was compulsory.

The Doctor was opposed as well. 'Symbols are important,' he said. 'Every time you see Tarak's memorial it will remind you of the evils you overcame, and of all those who gave their lives for your freedom.'

The decision taken, the delegates began squabbling about who should build the memorial, where it should stand and who should pay for it.

The Doctor detached himself from the group.

'Old Winston was quite right,' he said to himself. 'Democracy is a very inefficient form of government – it's just better than anything else that's ever been tried!'

Guiltily aware that he'd been gone for far longer than the promised few minutes, he went to rejoin Romana, only to

find that she was nowhere to be seen.

'Where's Romana?' he demanded again to the room at large. He raised his voice. 'Romana?'

A young rebel hurried to his side. 'You seek the Lady Romana, my lord?'

'Just Doctor will do,' said the Doctor. 'I hate all this bowing and scraping.'

'Yes, my lord Doctor. Sorry, my lord Doctor,' said the rebel.

The Doctor sighed. 'Have you seen Romana?'

'Yes, my lord, she left the dome some time ago.'

'What!' said the Doctor. 'Why? Who with? Why wasn't I told?'

'She left with Hurda, my lord, the kitchen-maid at the House of Zara, my lord. There was some problem with a sick child, but I fear she should not have gone.'

'Why?'

'Zarn was a trusted servant of the Three Who Rule, my lord. He made many visits to the tower.'

'Well, why didn't you warn Romana?'

The young rebel looked shocked. 'It is not my place to advise such as you and the Lady Romana, my lord.'

There were disadvantages to being thought all-knowing and all-powerful, mused the Doctor. Nobody told you anything, since they assumed you knew it all already.

Now Romana had gone off to pay a midnight call on what might well turn out to be a colony of vampires – without, of course, bothering to tell him.

The trouble with Time Ladies, thought the Doctor rather guiltily, was that they were far too independent. He had a brief pang of nostalgia for the kind of female companion who stayed glued to his side and screamed at the first sign of danger.

'Presumably this Zarn knows things have changed,' said the Doctor thoughtfully. 'If he doesn't, he soon will. I can't think he'd risk harming Romana.' But there was still a tinge of unease in his mind. Turning to the young rebel, he came to a decision.

'Can you tell me how to reach the House of Zarn?'

The boy looked worried. 'It would be difficult, my lord. The forest paths are treacherous and confusing, especially at night.'

His face brightened. 'I could take you there!'

'Well, I'm not sure…'

'Please, let me, my lord. It would be an honour to serve you. They wouldn't let me take part in the attack, they said I was too young. If I could do something to help the ones who saved us…'

Touched by all this youthful enthusiasm, the Doctor agreed. He looked across at Kalmar, who was still arguing with his colleagues. The Doctor knew that he had only to say the word to have most of the rebel army accompany them. It seemed like a lot of unnecessary fuss.

Simpler to go alone.

He turned to the boy. 'What's your name?'

'I am called Xan, my lord.'

'Right, Xan, let's be off.'

'I will fetch cloaks, my lord. It is cold in the forest at night.'

Xan rushed off to the other side of the dome and returned with two of the grey hooded cloaks worn by the rebels. He had two long swords tucked under his arm.

'Here, my lord Doctor. I have brought weapons as well.'

'Not for me,' said the Doctor firmly. 'I don't approve of violence.' He looked critically at the cloak. 'Somehow I

don't think this is really me, either. I'm all right as I am.'

He wound his long scarf more tightly around his neck and pulled on his battered hat.

Xan looked puzzled for a moment, then told himself that so powerful a being as the Doctor had no need of ordinary garments and weapons. No doubt he could summon thunderbolts with a snap of his fingers. Besides, he had Xan to protect him.

Proudly Xan strapped the sword, which was almost as big as he was, around his waist and put on the cloak.

'I am ready, my lord.'

'Then lead the way.'

They hurried off into the night.

Romana was attending a vampire feast. She sat at the head of the oval table, an empty chair beside her. It reminded her of the feast she and the Doctor had once shared with the late King Zargo and Queen Camilla. The dining room was much simpler – a long dark chamber hung with black velvet drapes and filled with heavy oak furniture. There was an big arched window, draped with a blood-red velvet curtain.

The food was a simpler version of that served at the royal banquet. Platters of sliced meat, so undercooked as to be still bloody, an assortment of root vegetables and loaves of coarse bread. The wine was inferior, some rough red local vintage, served not in crystal glasses but in wooden goblets.

At that earlier feast, Romana had cut her finger when one of the crystal glasses had shattered. She shivered, remembering how Camilla's eyes had glittered at the sight of her blood. That hungry glitter was there now in the eyes of her fellow guests – those sinister figures who had

appeared in the doorway – as they tore at the bloody meat with long, sharp teeth.

Romana had an uncomfortable feeling that she herself might turn out to be the main course.

She turned to Zarn, who taken a seat beside her at the head of the table. 'I can't think what you hope to gain by keeping me here.'

'We hope to gain the presence of the Doctor.' He nodded to the empty chair on her right. 'When he learns what has happened, he will come to find you.'

'If he does, he will bring the rebel army with him.'

'Why should he? He has no reason to suspect any real danger.'

'Even if he does come and you capture him, what then?'

'The Doctor has destroyed our King and Queen, and Aukon, their High Priest,' said Zarn. 'Not only them, but the Great One whom they all served.'

'We thought that was the end of the vampires,' said Romana. 'But it seems there are more of you.'

'Many more, my lady. The Three Who Rule – who ruled – spread the vampire strain all over this land. The village was the centre, since it was there that the Great One was buried, awaiting the time to arise. But visitors came to the tower from far and wide. They stayed for a time, became *changed* and returned to their homes to change others. In every village, every city, in the blood of every noble family on the planet, we are waiting. What is to become of us now?'

'They will hunt you down and destroy you,' said Romana.

There was a hissing of anger from the assembled vampires.

'You are right,' said Zarn calmly. 'First the *garil* flower to detect us. Then the stake through the heart, the beheading

and the fire – that will be our fate all over the land – thanks to you and the Doctor.'

'So you want revenge?'

'Not at all. We want – replacements. You and the Doctor will be our new King and Queen.'

'Are you serious?'

'Completely, my lady. With you at our head, these peasant scum will not dare to attack us. They will come to fear you, as once they revered the Three.'

'What makes you think we'd be willing to become your rulers?'

Zarn smiled, revealing his long pointed fangs. 'Soon you will be not only willing but eager to lead us, my lady. Soon you will both be vampires – like us!'

Xan strode confidently along the twisting forest paths, the Doctor at his heels.

It was just as well he had accepted the services of a guide, thought the Doctor. Of course, the route was now stored forever in his Time Lord memory, but he would never have found it alone.

They were moving fast, but even so it was some time before they reached the hollow with the old house crouching deep inside.

'There it is, my lord Doctor,' said Xan. 'The house of Zarn.'

'Highly impressive detached des. res.,' muttered the Doctor to himself. 'All right, Xan, many thanks for your help. Now, just in case things aren't all they seem, I want you to nip back to the dome and tell Kalmar where we are. If we're not back in a few hours, he might like to come and look for us.'

'How will you find your way back without me, my

lord Doctor?'

'I'll manage,' said the Doctor. 'A path once trodden is never forgotten! Off you go, Xan!'

As the boy hurried away, the Doctor strode down the path towards the house. To the right of the door, light shone through a gap in heavy curtains that draped a big arched window. Glass invented already, noted the Doctor, in mild surprise. Still a luxury for the wealthy, no doubt.

He made his way to the massive front door and hammered on the heavy iron knocker. There was no response.

The Doctor raised his voice:

'"Is there anybody there?" said the Traveller,

Knocking on the moonlit door."'

The door creaked open, revealing a peasant woman carrying a lantern. She stared at the Doctor in horror. 'No! Not you!'

Not deterred by this unpromising reception, the Doctor said cheerfully, 'Sorry to disturb you so late, but I'm looking for the Lady Romana. Is she here?'

'She has gone,' whispered the woman. 'You must go too, Doctor. Death and worse than death awaits you here.'

The Doctor noticed a child hiding behind the woman's skirts.

'Would your name be Hurda by any chance?'

Before the woman could reply, a stocky figure in a leather jerkin appeared behind her. 'Doctor! I am Zarn. Welcome to my house! The Lady Romana is expecting you – she said you would probably come to fetch her.'

'Is she ready to leave? I understand there was some problem with a sick child...'

'The child is well now. I'm afraid Hurda panicked

unnecessarily and brought your friend here for nothing. Isn't that so, Hurda?' He turned and smiled at the cowering maidservant. It was a cold and terrible smile.

The peasant woman bowed her head.

'Yes, Master.'

'Better take the child up to bed,' said Zarn. 'You don't want her taking a chill.'

The woman snatched up the child and disappeared inside the house.

'A glass of wine before you and your friend depart,' said Zarn. 'Though you're welcome to stay the night if you prefer.'

'We'd better get back,' said the Doctor. 'It's been rather a busy night, one 'way and another.'

'So I hear,' said Zarn. 'A glass of wine at least, then?'

He stood aside, beckoning the Doctor to enter.

'Well, if you insist,' said the Doctor. 'Just a quick one.'

He followed Zarn into the dark hallway. It seemed pretty obvious that he was walking into a trap. But if he was going to get Romana out, there didn't seem anything else to do.

Zarn ushered him along the gloomy hall and through a door to their right. At the sight of Romana at the head of the table, surrounded by white-faced figures with eager, glittering eyes, the Doctor knew exactly what was going on.

'Having a midnight feast, Romana?' he inquired affably.

'You could say that, Doctor. But I warn you – it's not exactly the Teddy Bears' Picnic.'

'Oh, I don't know,' said the Doctor. '"If you go down to the woods today, you're in for a *big* surprise!'

He gave Romana one of his sudden flashing smiles, strolled to the head of the table and took the vacant seat at her side.

Romana passed him the wine jug. 'Try some, Doctor. It's

a naive little domestic Burgundy, but I think you'll be amused by its presumption.'

The Doctor poured himself a goblet of wine, sipped, and shuddered. 'Very -spirited!' He looked at Zarn. 'Now then, what's all this about?'

Before Zarn could reply Romana said, 'It's a career opportunity, Doctor – for both of us. They want us to be their new King and Queen.'

'How very flattering. Still, I suppose we did create a couple of job vacancies.' He raised an eyebrow at Zarn. 'But surely, we're not qualified? I mean, I'm very fond of garlic – I think you call it *garil*, don't you?'

At the mention of the hated herb, the vampires around the table hissed angrily.

Undeterred the Doctor went on, 'What's more, I've no objection to religious symbols like the crucifix, and I positively enjoy running water and bright sunlight.'

Zarn's lips tightened with anger. Romana suddenly realised that to him the subject of vampirism was sacred, the Doctor's mockery intolerable.

'If you refer to the fact that you are not one of us, Doctor,' said Zarn grimly, 'that can be remedied.'

'I see. One quick nip and we're in the vampire club, is that it?'

'It's not quite that simple, Doctor,' said Zarn furiously.

The Doctor looked surprised. 'It isn't? Tell me about it.'

Zarn looked suspiciously at him, but there was genuine interest on the Doctor's face.

The Doctor's insatiable curiosity was at work again, thought Romana. He really wanted to know.

'We "nip" as you choose to call it, Doctor, in order to feed,' said Zarn coldly. 'If we drink too deeply, the subject

dies. But even if the subject recovers – and many do – he or she will not become a vampire.'

'Why not?' asked Romana. 'I thought that was how it worked.'

Zarn laughed horribly. 'Do you think that every piece of peasant scum we use to feed our hunger then joins our noble order?'

'But you do – recruit?' insisted Romana. 'You yourself said Zargo and Camilla spread vampirism throughout the land.'

'The process of conversion – the *change*, we call it – takes place over many nights. We drink the blood of the chosen one, time after time, taking him – ' he smiled at Romana – 'or *her* close to, but not over, the brink of death…'

'What happens then?'

'Either the chosen one dies or becomes one of us. Not all are suitable. A certain strength of spirit is required to survive the process.'

That must be why Aukon was so keen to vampirise young Adric, thought Romana. He sensed Adric had the strength of spirit they needed.

Ignoring Zarn, the Doctor addressed Romana, deliberately using the calm, detached tone of one scientist discussing an interesting theory with another:

'In my view – for this bunch of vampires, at least – a kind of forced mutation occurs. It takes several exposures for the vampire toxin to establish itself in the bloodstream. If the subject survives various changes occur. The cardiovascular and muscular systems are immensely strengthened, and the ageing process is arrested.'

Romana replied in the same cool scientific tone:

'You do get the various side effects of course – sensitivity

to light, mild hydrophobia, the allergy to the allyl component in garlic…'

The Doctor nodded. 'And of course, the raging hunger for extra protein that the altered system needs. Hence the blood-drinking.'

He turned to Zarn. 'You know, you could actually get the same effect by gnawing a good hunk of Cheddar cheese, but it doesn't quite have the right mystique, does it?'

'You defile a sacred mystery with this scientific ranting,' snarled Zarn. 'You will feel differently about vampirism soon, Doctor. You will see it as a great and noble order. Who else can defy death?'

'It is our eventual death that gives meaning to our lives,' said the Doctor, levelly. 'I'm sorry, but we must decline your flattering offer – mustn't we, Romana?'

Romana stood up as well. 'We certainly must.'

'I am not offering you a choice, Doctor,' said Zarn.

'Then I'll offer you one. You can flee now or stay and be destroyed by the rebel army. I sent my guide back to their HQ for help.'

'The boy may never reach his destination,' said Zarn. 'The forest paths are dangerous at night.'

The Doctor took Romana's arm, moving away from the table until they stood by the great window.

'I'm afraid we must still decline. Time to leave, Romana.'

At a sign from Zarn, the vampires left the table and moved to block their way to the door.

The Doctor looked down at Romana and said urgently, 'If we get separated, don't wait for me. Make for the dome and get help.'

Romana looked at him in puzzlement, wondering what he meant.

All became clear when he picked her up and hurled her through the curtained window with incredible force. Protected by the heavy velvet curtain, Romana crashed through the shattered window and landed on the ground outside in a tangle of cloth.

After a frantic struggle she freed herself from the entangling drapes and looked up. She saw the Doctor at the window, struggling to free himself from Zarn and the others.

'Run, Romana,' he called. 'You can't help me alone.'

'What about you, Doctor?'

'They won't kill me, they need me!'

The Doctor was right, thought Romana miserably. On her own she could do nothing. If she fetched help she might just possibly get back in time to save his life.

As the Doctor went down beneath a tidal wave of angry vampires, Romana fled down the drive and into the dark forest.

CHAPTER 12

BLOOD OF A TIME LORD

As Romana ran, the Doctor struggled desperately to get to the door. He knew he would never reach it, but he hoped to keep the vampires too busy preventing his escape to think about Romana.

The Doctor and the cluster of his attackers reeled to and fro in the gloomy, cluttered dining room. Chairs were smashed and the heavy table overturned. Whenever he could get a grip, the Doctor would send one of his attackers hurtling across the room. But there was always another vampire to take its place, and the thrown attacker would crash to the ground, scrabble to its feet and run screeching to rejoin the fray.

Dimly the Doctor was aware of Zarn, standing back with a lantern held high, directing the attack. He could hear his voice rising above the shrill screeching of the vampires. 'Seize his arms and legs! Hold him down!'

The struggle went on for quite some time, but the end was inevitable. Vampires, like Time Lords, are stronger than they look and the Doctor was outnumbered by a dozen to one.

He gave up at last, spread-eagled on the floor in the middle of the wrecked dining room, three vampires to each leg, and two to each arm.

Zarn turned to the two remaining vampires. 'You! Go after his companion. Fetch her back here.'They sped from the room.

The Doctor smiled in grim satisfaction. How long had he kept up the struggle? Ten minutes, a quarter of an hour… Romana could get a long way in that time. And there was

little fear of her getting lost. Her Time Lord memory, like his own, would retain a route she had once followed.

So, there was a good chance that she would get away, and if she did, she would be back with help in the shortest possible time. Come to that, if Xan had eluded his pursuers, help might already be on the way. It had better not be too long in coming, though, thought the Doctor grimly. His own situation was very far from satisfactory.

'Hold him while I send for chains,' ordered Zarn. 'Tomorrow night we shall begin the ceremony.'

Snarls of disappointment came from the vampires. 'No! Why should we wait? We must feed now!'

One of the female vampires, a haggard, white-faced, red-eyed creature who had once been beautiful, pulled the folds of the long scarf away from the Doctors throat. Before Zarn could prevent her she plunged her fangs deep into his neck.

The Doctor's body writhed and plunged as he felt the bite of the fangs, but the vampires held him fast.

The vampire girl raised blood-bedabbled lips. 'Drink! The blood of a Time Lord is sweet!'

Another vampire thrust her aside and took her place. Still others pushed back the Doctor's sleeves, plunged their fangs into the veins at his wrists.

'Stop, you fools!' screamed Zarn. 'Stop or you'll kill him. We need him alive!'

His ravening followers paid him no attention, continuing with their dreadful feast. The Doctor struggled furiously, but to less and less effect.

Already he could feel the strength, and the life, beginning to drain from his body…

* * *

Romana ran along the dark forest paths, desperately making time and distance calculations in her head. So long to reach the dome, so long to convince Kalmar of the urgency of the situation, to assemble an armed force and return to the house of Zarn… and always the same result – too long to be sure of saving the Doctor's life.

She could try and bring the rescuers back in the TARDIS – but despite recent success on Alzarius, the TARDIS was normally even more unreliable than usual when it came to very short trips. The Doctor might be able to manage it, but she wasn't at all sure that she could. The slightest error and the could all end up a hundred miles away.

The only hope was that the vampires would keep the Doctor alive for the lengthy initiation ceremony that Zarn had described and that she could rescue the Doctor before the vampire mutation was complete.

A vampire Time Lord was simply unthinkable. Romana shuddered at the thought of driving a steak through the Doctor's hearts.

She ran as fast as she dared, dodging overhanging branches that lashed at her face, struggling to keep her footing on the uneven path. At this point, a sprained ankle could mean death for the Doctor, and for Romana herself if the vampires found her.

She was sure that she was being pursued.

She broke through unto one of the larger clearings and found that death was already there, in the shape of a huddled figure at the base of a tree on the other side. She crossed the clearing and knelt beside the body

Wide astonished eyes stared up at her from a dead-white face. It was Xan, the boy that had found her the medikit – which she's left at the house of Zarn, she remembered.

The boy must have acted as the Doctor's guide; he must've been sent back for help.

There was a gaping wound in his throat and his body had clearly been drained of blood. A sword he'd never had a chance to use lay close to his hand.

She remembered Zarn's chilling words: 'The boy may never reach his destination. The forest paths are dangerous at night.'

She pulled the grey cloak over Xan's white face, then froze in disbelief as a familiar sound came from behind her. A wheezing, groaning sound.

She rose and whirled round, and was just in time to see a blue police box materialise in the centre of the clearing.

What could it mean? Another Time Lord in another TARDIS? But why the police box shape? Only one TARDIS was frozen into that ridiculous anachronistic form and it was standing in the rebel HQ. Or was it?

Suddenly Romana realised:Adric, of course, it was Adric and K9 between them. They'd discovered what happened and come to the rescue.

But when the TARDIS door opened, it wasn't Adric who stepped out into the moonlit clearing, but a tall, good-looking young man with blue eyes and longish brown hair. He wore a brown frock coat, a wing-collared white shirt and a grey velvet cravat, an ornately embroidered waistcoat, and tailored grey trousers. He looked handsome, dashing and elegant – and strangely familiar.

He gave Romana a charming smile and a little bow. 'Good evening!'

'Who are –' Romana broke off with a gasp as their minds touched briefly. She didn't have to ask the question because she knew. 'But that's impossible…'

'It is, isn't it?' agreed the Doctor. He looked at the huddled body. 'But I don't think there's time to discuss it. What's going on here?'

Once again their minds met in brief telepathic contact and, this time, Romana concentrated hard on their recent adventure. When it was over, the Doctor knew everything that Romana knew.

He shook his head. 'Vampires! Who'd have believed it? Well, we'd better get busy and rescue me.'

'I was on my way to get help –'

'No time,' said the Doctor decisively. 'You'd already worked that out, hadn't you? We must act by ourselves.'

'Alone?'

'We're not alone are we? We've got each other. And we've got the element of surprise on our side. Since they're already holding me captive, the vampires won't be expecting me to turn up and rescue me. What is it?'

Romana was staring over his shoulder, her eyes wide.

'Look out, Doctor!'

The Doctor turned round in time to see two black-clad figures advancing from the woods behind them. They had white faces, glittering eyes, claw-like hands – and long fangs.

Screeching, the vampires sprang...

The Doctor reacted with extraordinary speed. Reaching up, he wrenched a thick branch from the nearest tree. The branch splintered away from the trunk, leaving a jagged end. With incredible force, the Doctor rammed the branch end into the chest of the nearest vampire. It burst through the rib-cage, producing an unearthly scream and a great spurt of blood.

Thrusting the transfixed vampire away, the Doctor turned to meet the attack of the second. As it sprang, he

stooped down, sending it flying over his shoulder. In the same motion, the Doctor snatched up the sword that lay by Xan's body.

When the vampire returned to the attack the Doctor swung the sword in a gleaming horizontal arc and something round rolled away across the clearing.

For a moment the headless vampire stood erect, a fountain of blood gushing from its neck. Then it crumpled to the ground.

Romana saw the white face of the vampire staring up at her, the head several yards away from the body.

'So much blood,' she whispered. 'So much blood…'

Tossing aside the bloodstained sword, the Doctor saw her shocked expression.

'Sorry to be melodramatic, but they've got an incredibly efficient cardiovascular system, and amazing recuperative powers. Small wounds seal up and heal almost immediately. It takes something pretty drastic to finish them off!'

This new Doctor was just as fond of delivering lectures as the old one, thought Romana. She looked down at the dead vampires and then at Xan's body. So young – and he had died because he was trying to help them.

'Don't worry, Doctor, I'm not shedding any tears for dead vampires. What now?'

'Back to the house of Zarn. I wonder how I'm getting on?'

Kalmar looked around the dome in mild surprise.

'The Doctor has gone,' he complained. 'So has the Lady Romana. Surely they have not left us already?'

'Their craft is still here,' said Ivo. He pointed to the blue box, then raised his voice in a bellow.

'Anyone seen the Doctor and the Lady Romana?'

Half a dozen rebels rushed forwards, all talking at once.

'Shut up!' roared Ivo. 'One at a time!'

After questioning all the witnesses, it emerged first that the Lady Romana had gone off with Hurda and second, that the Doctor, guided by Xan had gone off to look for her.

'Hurda is the servant of Zarn,' said Kalmar thoughtfully.

'I know nothing against her, but Zarn was ever a loyal follower of the Three.'

'So the Lady Romana and the Doctor and young Xan have all gone to the House of Zarn,' growled Ivo. 'And none of them has returned. Well, it's time that nest of vampires was smoked out.'

'Exactly so,' said Kalmar. 'I fear it will be the first of many.'

Ivo began assembling a party of picked men, all seasoned fighters.

Remember, pikes and axes, lads,' he roared. 'It's no use poking at them with swords and spears – you must shatter their hearts or lop off their heads. Every man is to wear a wreath of *garil* about his neck.'

'Hurry now,' urged old Kalmar. 'For all we know it may already be too late. If we lose our saviours now, we shall taste the bitterness of defeat in the hour of victory.'

The Doctor and Romana paused at the edge of the hollow, looking down at the house of Zarn.

The long, low building was dark and silent.

'What now?' whispered Romana.

'Reconnaissance. What's it like round the back?'

'I'll show you.'

Romana led him past the front of the silent house, noticing that the window used for her sudden exit was now boarded up. She turned down the path that Hurda

had taken when she had brought her here the first time.

The Doctor studied the huddle of outbuildings with satisfaction. He was particularly interested in the low shed that was actually built on to the house. Followed by Romana, he went to the door and tried it. The door swung gently open.

He peered into the shed. Moonlight shone through the open door, revealing piles of logs and stacks of already-chopped firewood. A woodsman's axe was sunk into a chopping block just outside the door. Wooden barrels were lined along the far wall. He went over to one, touched its tap and sniffed his fingers.

'Oil for the lamps. Oil and firewood, all stored conveniently close to the house. Excellent!'

He took a stone jug from a cluttered shelf, filled it with lamp oil from the barrel and then splashed the oil over the firewood.

Romana looked on disapprovingly.

'Doctor, you can't just – '

'Oh, can't I? Just watch me! A match, a match, my kingdom for a match…'The Doctor fished in all his pockets and finally produced a huge wooden sulphur-match. 'Nothing like a Lucifer!'

He struck the match on his thumbnail, watched it splutter into life, and tossed it onto the oil-soaked firewood. Then he stood back and watched as the firewood started to burn.

'Are you sure that's the best way to rescue a prisoner – burning down the prison?' asked Romana acidly.

'Burn down the outhouse adjoining the prison,' corrected the Doctor. 'When the fire starts to spread the people in the house will have to come to deal with it to

stop it spreading. They rush out, we rush in. Simple!'

The flames rose higher. The Doctor grabbed Romana's hand and pulled her through the door.

'Come on. We'll go and lurk in the bushes until they realise what's happening.'

They heard a sudden hiss of rage. Turning round, they saw a black-cloaked white-faced figure bearing down on them, claw-like hands outstretched.

The Doctor snatched the woodsman's axe from its block, and swept the blade round in a shining arc… Romana closed her eyes and shuddered.

She heard a sinister *thunk*, a thud and the sound of something heavy rolling across the grass.

She opened her eyes in time to see the Doctor throwing the vampire's headless body into the burning shed. He went and picked up the head and tossed it in after.

'Just like golf really, it's all in the swing!' said the Doctor, grimly. He hefted the axe, and thudded it back into the block.

Romana knew the show of levity was for her benefit; she could see the regret in his eyes, even at having to kill an ancient undead enemy. 'It must have been returning to the house and spotted what we were up to,' she said. 'You'd better keep that axe handy.'

'Certainly not, you know I don't approve of violence – except when absolutely necessary of course. Come on, let's hide in those bushes over there.'

The flames roared higher, consuming the long shed and illuminating the house with a lurid glow. One of the oil-barrels exploded with a satisfying *whoomph!*.

Cries of alarm came from the house and people started rushing out. Some were homespun-clad house servants –

she saw Hurda, carrying her child – and others were Zarn's black-cloaked vampire guests.

Romana saw Zarn himself, organising the fireflghting. 'Get buckets and form a chain from the pond,' he bellowed. 'Hurry before it gets a hold on the house. Everyone help!'

The Doctor's simple plan seemed to be working. He tugged her hand. 'Come on!'

Keeping to the shadows just beyond the fire-lit area, they worked their way round to the front door, which stood half open. Unseen, they slipped inside.

The hall was lit by a single oil lamp, standing on a side-table. They looked about them.

'Which way?' whispered Romana.

'Oh, downwards, I think, don't you? Something tells me vampires prefer cellars to attics. Let's try that door there.'

The heavy door swung open to reveal stone steps leading downwards. The Doctor picked up the lamp and led the way.

They found the Fourth Doctor on a filthy mattress in the dank cellar. He was neither bound nor guarded, and it was easy to see why. His body was limp and motionless, his face a ghastly white. For one terrible moment Romana thought he was actually dead.

The air shimmered and Romana froze…

The Doctor knelt by his other self and took his hand. He saw the bloody wounds in the wrists and at the neck. After a moment the Fourth Doctor's eyes fluttered open and he managed a feeble grin.

'You again!'

'Yes, me again.'

'You almost left it too late this time. As it is, you're just

in time to say goodbye.'

'Nonsense.'

'I'm afraid not. Our vampire friends got a little carried away. I've lost a tremendous amount of blood. I can't last much longer… Don't know if I've even got the strength to give you your memories back.'

'Don't worry about that now, we can reminisce later. And forget all this nonsense about dying.'

'It's too late, I tell you…'

'Rubbish!'

The air shimmered and time resumed its normal flow.

Romana frowned, aware that something had happened.

'What was that about?'

'Temporary temporal stasis. Seems to happen whenever I meet myself. Don't worry about it.'

Romana knelt to examine the Fourth Doctor, who had lapsed into unconsciousness. After a moment she straightened up and said bleakly, 'We're too late. He's dying. They've drained almost all the blood from his body.'

'Rubbish,' said the Doctor. 'If he dies, I'll never live, and I'm not having that!'

'It would take a massive blood transfusion to save him, and it has to be Time Lord blood. I happen to know mine's not compatible. Where else are we going to find –' She broke off, staring at the Doctor, eyes widening in sudden hope.

'Exactly,' said the Doctor. 'Let's get him out of here.'

He stooped and lifted the Fourth Doctor in his arms. They made their way up the cellar steps, through the hall and out of the house.

The situation had changed.

A semicircle of vampires stood waiting for them, grouped just in front of the massive front door with Zarn at

the centre. Glancing beyond them, Romana saw that the fire was under control. The house servants were dealing with it now, leaving the surviving vampires free to deal with their enemies. There were fewer of them than before, thought Romana, but there were still enough.

'I wondered if the outbreak of the fire wasn't a little too convenient,' said Zarn. 'It wasn't hard to work out who had started it – and why!'

He stared hungrily at Romana and the Doctor, who stood beside her, cradling the body of the Fourth Doctor in his arms.

'So you have come back to us, Time Lady. Bringing –' He broke off, staring hard at the Doctor. 'Bringing, I do believe, another Time Lord to replace the one we – wasted.' He laughed. 'Another Doctor!'

'The same Doctor actually,' said the Doctor. 'Don't let it worry you.'

'So my plan can go ahead,' whispered Zarn. 'This time we shall be more careful. Welcome, Time Lords. It is time for you to join us!'

'I don't think so,' said the Doctor. He was looking past Zarn, staring into the distance. 'Your time is over.'

Zarn stepped forwards, arms stretched out as if to seize them. Suddenly something flashed through the night air. Zarn staggered and the metal point of a pike-head burst from the front of his chest, followed by a spreading stain of blood. A pike hurled by Ivo from the edge of the forest.

Zarn screamed and fell, hands clawing at the long pole that transfixed his body.

The rebels came out of the forest, pikes and axes in their hands.

* * *

The battle that followed was as bloody as it was brief.

The vampires died quickly, thrust through with massive pikes, beheaded with axes. Abandoning their fire-fighting efforts the servants fled and the fire started regaining ground, spreading to the house. When the slaughter was over, Ivo ordered the bodies of the vampires to be hurled into the flames.

Then, worried for the Doctor, he looked for the Lady Romana and the stranger, but they had gone.

The Doctor strode along the path, seemingly unconscious of the weight of the Fourth Doctor in his arms.

Romana stared at the Fourth Doctor's white face, then spoke sadly: 'We'll never get him to the dome in time.'

'We only have to get him to my TARDIS. We'll go the rest of the way in that.'

They reached the clearing at last and headed for the blue police box, ignoring the vampire bodies lying nearby.

'We must take poor Xan with us,' said Romana. The Doctor passed Romana a key, she opened the door and all three went inside. Moments later the Doctor emerged to collect Xan's body and carried it inside.

A wheezing, groaning sound filled the clearing and the TARDIS faded away....

That same strange sound startled Kalmar and the other rebels in the dome. They stared at the blue box, wondering if it was leaving of its own accord. It shimmered for a moment, but stayed where it was. Then the door opened and the Lady Romana appeared, carrying the slight body of Xan. She handed it over to an amazed rebel.

'I'm sorry. The vampires caught him in the forest.'

Romana was followed by a stranger who bore the unconscious Doctor in his arms.

Kalmar examined Xan's body. 'It is too late for Xan. And the Doctor?'

'I'm not sure. It depends what I can find among those salvaged medical supplies of yours.' She turned to the stranger. 'Bring him over here…'

When Ivo and his attack squad returned to the dome they were met by an astonishing sight. The Doctor and the stranger lay on twin couches, their arms connected by blood-filled transparent tubes to a complex piece of machinery between them. The whole process was being supervised by the Lady Romana. The *Hydrax* sick bay had miraculously included an emergency transfusion kit.

Kalmar put a finger to his lips as Ivo and his men entered the dome and came over to them.

'What is happening?' whispered Ivo.

'The stranger Doctor gives his blood to save our Doctor. It is very scientific…'

Both Doctors lay dozing peacefully on their couches. As blood flowed into the Fourth Doctor's veins, his memories flowed into the Doctor's mind.

'There, that's it,' said Romana at last.

She disconnected them from the apparatus, and applied the necessary sticking plasters.

The Fourth Doctor's other wounds had already been dressed and were already starting to heal. Romana looked at him.

'You've got just about all the blood you need – which is fortunate, since he's given all he can spare.'

The Fourth Doctor grinned. 'You deserve a cup of tea and a biscuit, old chap, but you'll have to settle for a goblet of the local wine.'

The Doctors sat up on their couches and drank their wine, toasting each other and then Romana.

'I suppose nobody's going to tell me what all this is about?' she said.

'We would if we could,' said the Doctor. 'All I can tell you is that I lost my memory – my memories – and I have to find my other selves to get them back.'

'How is it going?'

'Not too badly. I'm not quite the man I was, but I'm getting there. Which reminds me, I'd better be off.'

Romana felt strangely disappointed. 'So soon?'

The Doctor drained his wine and stood up.

'We temporal anomalies mustn't hang around too long.'

He shook hands with the Fourth Doctor, then took Romana's hand and kissed her gently on the cheek. 'Goodbye!' He strode across to the TARDIS and disappeared inside.

A wheezing, groaning sound filled the air.

Romana looked at her Doctor in alarm. 'The TARDISes have merged! If he takes the only TARDIS now we'll be stranded.'

'No need to worry,' said the Doctor. 'Look!'

They watched as a sort of ghost TARDIS rose from the original and floated away.

'He's gone!' said Romana.

'That's right,' said the Doctor. 'Of course, in a way he was never really here.'

'What shall we tell Adric and K9?'

'Nothing! They'd never believe us anyway!'

CHAPTER 13

TIMESCOOP

The Doctor lay stretched out on the chaise-longue in the TARDIS control room. On the table beside him stood a mug of hot, sweet tea and a plate of buttered toast.

He was dozing, eyes half-closed, hovering between sleep and waking, and he was reminiscing, leafing through the memories of his other selves, reacquainting himself with the events of their adventurous lives.

As the First Doctor had predicted, even those memories, dormant in his own mind, were beginning to stir… He was recovering.

He thought of the fierce old man in the prehistoric jungle, of the gentle little fellow who had sacrificed his own freedom so that others might be free. He saw the tall, elegant dandy struggling bitterly against the chains of his exile but unable to resist defending the planet that had become his prison. He saw the casual bohemian in the floppy hat and ridiculously long scarf who dared to take on the evil that stalks the dark.

He had no reason to be ashamed of himselves, thought the Doctor. Indeed, there was much of which to be modestly proud.

What had the old man said? Seven regenerations…

Three more to go.

'When and where will they be, and what will they be doing?' murmured the Doctor sleepily. 'What will they be like?'

His eyes closed, his head nodded and a half-eaten slice of buttered toast slipped from his hand and dropped to the floor, landing, as always, buttered side down. The Doctor slept.

As his two hearts pumped steadily, his extraordinary Time Lord physiology laboured to restore him to full health and strength. Sleep, the Doctor had once observed, is for tortoises. But even a Time Lord needs to take it easy occasionally, especially with half of his blood supply to make up.

Summoned yet again to the Temporal Control Room, President Flavia studied the tempograph on the big monitor screen. The short red segment that represented the Doctor's seventh regeneration had reappeared. It seemed to be motionless.

'The tempograph now indicates, Madam President,' began Chief Temporal Technician Volnar nervously,' that the Doctor -'

'– is back in normal space and time,' snapped Flavia. 'That much I can see for myself. Have you any idea why his time trace disappeared?'

'I think I have, Madam President. The Fourth Doctor's time trace once showed a similar anomaly, as did that of his then companion, the Lady Romanadvoratrelundar. I believe that for a time he passed through a Charged Vacuum Emboitment into E-Space, which as you know is –'

'– a kind of parallel universe,' concluded Flavia impatiently.

'Exactly so, Madam President,' agreed Volnar, wondering if he was ever going to be allowed to finish a sentence.

'So the Doctor visited his fourth reincarnation, then in

E-Space, and has now returned. Is he heading for his fifth self?'

'Apparently not, Madam President. As you can see, there appears to be some kind of hiatus. The Doctor seems to be, well, resting. Perhaps the phenomenon is at an end.'

'I very much doubt it. Something tells me that if the Doctor has revisited his first, second, third and fourth selves, he will go on to meet his fifth, sixth and seventh selves as well.'

Volnar spread his hands helplessly. 'You may well be right, Madam President. For now, I cannot tell.'

Flavia considered for a moment. 'Continue to observe the situation closely, Chief Technician. Report to me immediately there is any change.' She started to leave but was checked by an indignant voice.

'Madam President!'

Flavia turned to see Councillor Ryoth, surrounded by a small group of his cronies, standing a little apart. They looked, thought Flavia, rather like a protest delegation – which was precisely what they were.

'Is that all you propose to do, Madam President?' asked Ryoth, his voice quivering with indignation, 'Simply observe?'

The indignation was faked, thought Flavia. Ryoth was making a political speech.

'What would you have me do?' she asked calmly.

'The Doctor is breaking – nay shattering – the Laws of Time. It is my belief that he has gone rogue. He should be arrested, incarcerated, interrogated.'

'And executed?' asked Flavia coldly.

'If necessary, yes!'

'He should at least be brought back to Gallifrey and restrained for his own good,' urged Councillor Ortan. 'If he

has become unbalanced he may need our help.'

Flavia considered this argument for a moment. She shook her head. 'Without more knowledge we might well do more harm than good. Later perhaps, not yet.'

'Then you propose to do nothing?' demanded Ryoth.

'For the moment.'

And what of the danger to Gallifrey?'

Flavia turned to Chief Technician Volnar. 'Is there any disturbance in the Eye of Harmony?'

'None, Madam President.'

'Is there any draining of temporal energy?'

'No, Madam President.'

'Is there any sign, any indication however slight, that the Doctor's temporal peregrinations are endangering Gallifrey in any way?'

At present, none whatsoever, Madam President.'

'If any such signs appear you will inform me immediately.'

'Of course, Madam President.'

Flavia took Ryoth aside and fixed him with an icy glare. 'Your hatred of the Doctor is well known to me, Ryoth, as are the reasons for it,' she said softly. 'It would be regrettable – for you – if I decided to delve into those reasons more deeply.'

The blood drained from Ryoth's thin face.

'Whatever mistakes I may have made in the past, Madam President, my loyalty to you, and to the High Council –'

'– is debatable, to say the least,' said Flavia coldly. 'Castellan Spandrell has three files on those who have been politically indiscreet, Councillor Ryoth. The Black File holds the names of those who are about to be, or have been, arrested, tried, imprisoned, exiled or executed. The White File contains those who have been pardoned, who are

considered to have redeemed themselves by long and faithful service.' She paused. 'There is a third file – the Grey File. It contains the names of those whose fate is yet undecided. *But nobody stays in the Grey file forever, Councillor Ryoth – remember that.* Periodically the file is reviewed and action is taken. Certain names are transferred, to the White File – or to the Black. Those in the Grey File need to be extremely careful at all times. Do I make myself clear?'

Ryoth bowed. 'Completely so, Madam President.'

Flavia nodded and moved away, followed by her entourage.

Ryoth watched her go, his face filled with fear and hatred.

Ortan came to join him. 'What is it? What did she say to you?'

Ryoth recovered himself with an effort. 'She begged me to take no further action for the present.'

'But we were planning a formal protest to the High Council!'

'Not yet,' said Ryoth mysteriously. 'There are certain political considerations. We will act when the time is right.'

It took him quite a while to calm Ortan down – which was ironic, considering how long he'd spent stirring him up. But everything had changed now, Ryoth thought as he made his way back to his office. He'd made the mistake of underestimating that terrible little woman. For all her unassuming manner she was the President of the High Council. She had enormous power, should she choose to use it, and she had just reminded Ryoth of the fact.

Ryoth shuddered at the thought of coming under investigation by Castellan Spandrell. There was so much in his past that wouldn't bear close scrutiny. He had thought

he was clever enough to elude Spandrel's security net, but realised now that he had been deceiving himself. He was simply too small a fish to bother with – for the moment. And as Flavia had just reminded him, the situation could change.

Safe in his inner sanctum, Ryoth sat considering his next step. He dared not act openly against Flavia, not now. Castellan Spandrell was devoted to her and would move at her word. Ryoth's political record could be made to seem harmless or treasonable. It all depended who was writing the reports. Justice on Gallifrey was adjustable.

But if he couldn't attack Flavia, how could he destroy the Doctor? Because to destroy the Doctor was the passion of Ryoth's life.

A leader he had adored had been brought down by the Doctor and Ryoth had been plotting his revenge ever since.

He glanced towards his secret corn-link. The Agency, that was his only hope. The Agency could protect him against Flavia. They could even destroy the Doctor – if he could only persuade them that it was in their best interests.

One thing at least was in his favour. The Agency, like most ultra-secret intelligence organisations, was completely paranoid.

Ryoth opened the door and activated the corn-link.

The metallic voice said, 'Report.'

Ryoth gave an account of the latest developments in the Doctor affair. 'It seems very likely that he has become unbalanced. He is certainly dangerous, particularly to the Agency.'

The metallic voice said, 'Why?'

Ryoth made his pitch. 'We don't yet know why the Doctor is doing whatever he is doing – only that it indicates erratic and disturbed behaviour. Far more

significant is the fact that he has the ability to do it.'

'Explain.'

'The Doctor is breaking the Laws of Time in the most flagrant manner – without the aid or support of Temporal Control and without disturbing the Eye of Harmony. He must know that his actions will be detected, but he doesn't seem to care. Somehow he has gained access to powers that enable him to defy us – or perhaps he simply has powerful backers.'

Ryoth paused before taking the final plunge. 'It is rumoured that the Doctor has acted as your agent. He must know a great many secrets – and if he really is out of control…'

'It is dangerous to repeat rumours,' said the metallic voice.

Ryoth shivered at the implied menace. Had he gone too far?

'We shall consider what you have said,' the voice went on. 'Wait.'

Ryoth sat for what seemed a very long time. He grew hungry and thirsty and stiff, but he didn't dare move.

At last the transmat booth in the corner of the sanctum lit up and a figure appeared and stepped out. A slight, grey-haired Gallifreyan in grey robes, he looked like the most faceless of bureaucrats, but when he spoke, his voice exuded utter confidence and power. This was the voice of the Agency.

'We have been discussing your report. Opinion was divided and it was impossible to obtain a clear mandate for action. The Agency has to be more cautious these days. We will not, therefore, move officially against the Doctor.'

Ryoth felt a dull surge of disappointment.

'However,' the grey figure went on, 'A substantial

minority of us felt that your case deserved consideration. Some time ago, during the Borusa interregum, the Doctor did the Agency great harm. We have still not entirely recovered from the damage he caused us.'

The hatred in his voice reflected an animosity towards the Doctor as great as Ryoth's own.

'Go on,' said Ryoth eagerly.

'It is obvious that you feel very strongly on this matter.

Are you prepared to act against the Doctor yourself?'

'Willingly, but how can I? If I move openly, that bitch Flavia will have me arrested.'

'It is not the custom of the Agency to move openly,' the grey figure said thoughtfully, 'It seems that you have the will to act, but not the means. The Agency, however, has the means, but not, at present, the will.'

'Give me the means to destroy the Doctor and I assure you I will use them.'

'Whatever they are?'

'Whatever they are.'

The grey figure studied Ryoth's face, assessing his sincerity.

'Very well. Come with me.'

They both stepped into the transmat booth. It lit up and they disappeared.

Stepping out at the other end of the journey, Ryoth found himself in darkness. Wherever he was, the place was dank and cold. It smelled like a dungeon.

'Where am I?'

'In a secret vault, far beneath the Capitol.'

Ryoth's companion touched a wall control and dim lights illuminated the stone chamber. In a corner under a spotlight stood a complex machine which managed to look

both high-tech and antiquated at the same time.

It was decorated with ornate metal scrollwork and Ryoth shivered, recognising the style of the Dark Time.

'What is it?'

'It is called the Timescoop.'

'But the use of the Timescoop is forbidden. It was destroyed – '

'It was ordered to be destroyed, after the disappearance of President Borusa. We intercepted it. The Agency felt that it was too useful a device to waste.'

Ryoth felt sick. The squat, ornate device exuded evil.

'Why have you brought me here? What am I supposed to do with that thing?'

'If you wish, you can use it to kill the Doctor.'

CHAPTER 14

HARMONY

Far away in time and space the Doctor was leaning back in an armchair, sipping fruit juice and chatting idly to his two companions, a young man and a girl.

This wasn't the Doctor whose temporal wanderings were causing Flavia so much concern. This was the Doctor in his fifth incarnation, a slender, fair-haired young man with a deceptively mild and ingenuous air about him. People tended to underestimate this Doctor – until it was too late.

His clothes were those of a gentleman cricketer from Earth's Edwardian era: striped trousers, fawn blazer with red piping, white sweater and an open-necked shirt.

His companions were an odd pair. The girl's dress, brightly patterned in multicoloured squares, was set off with a white sash about her waist. She had a thin, eager face and aggressively cropped reddish-brown hair. Her name was Tegan Jovanka.

The young man wore the standard blazer-and-flannels outfit of a sixth-form pupil in an English public school. His shirt-collar was open and the striped school tie around his neck had been reduced to a strip of twisted cloth.He was thin-faced and sandy-haired, good-looking in a slightly shifty way. Formerly under the control of an evil entity known as the Black Guardian, Vislor Turlough had made several attempts to kill the Doctor. Now, however, the control was lifted and the Doctor was sure of Turlough's

loyalty. Well, fairly sure. There was still something about Turlough that made him mildly uneasy.

Despite her exotic name, Tegan had been born and raised in Australia and her voice had an Australian edge toil.

'Wasn't it kind of spooky, Doctor, meeting your earlier selves?'

The Doctor, Tegan and Turlough had just survived the most extraordinary adventure of the Doctor's lives.

The mind of Borusa, the Doctor's much-loved old teacher and the most distinguished of the Lord Presidents of Gallifrey had silently broken under the strain of his responsibilities. With crazed logic, he had decided that what was best for Gallifrey was that he alone should rule it forever. To achieve this he needed more than the twelve regenerations granted to every Time Lord. He needed true immortality.

According to Time Lord legend, immortality lay in the gift of Rassilon, the greatly revered founder of the Time Lords. Rassilon slept in his tomb in the Dark Tower at the heart of the Death Zone, a remote and forbidden area of Gallifrey.

It was said that anyone who could survive the dangers of the Death Zone, take the Ring of Immortality from Rassilon's finger and place it on his own would become immortal.

Legend also had it that in the Dark Time, many years before, the Time Lords had used something called the Timescoop to kidnap aggressive alien lifeforms from other worlds to have them fight to the death for the amusement of their captors.

This abominable practice had long been discontinued.

The Death Zone, scene of these bloody combats had been sealed off, and the use of the Timescoop forbidden. Borusa however had discovered the long-unused Timescoop control room in a hidden chamber beneath the Capitol and had used it to attempt to bring the five Doctors to the Death Zone. He had succeeded with only four of them, as the Timescoop had malfunctioned, and the Fourth Doctor had become trapped in a time loop.

In a crazed attempt to conceal his true purpose, Borusa had brought a number of their old enemies as well.

His mad scheme had been surprisingly successful.

All four Doctors had survived to reach the tomb, and Borusa had succeeded in placing the Ring of Immortality on his finger. But too late he had learned that the legend was a trap, designed by Rassilon to weed out megalomaniac Time Lords, a possible danger to their own race, who sought immortality.

Borusa had been given the immortality he craved. It took the form of living death. With others of his kind, he was now a living statue, built into the plinth of Rassilon's tomb.

And so the words of the old and obscure Time Lord saying had come to pass:

'This is the Game of Rassilon – to lose is to win, and he who wins shall lose.'

Borusa had played and won – and lost.

Lord Rassilon, still very much alive, at least in spirit, had freed the trapped Fourth Doctor, and sent the First, Second and Third Doctors and their companions home. The Fifth Doctor, fleeing determinedly from the offered post of Lord President, was now free to roam the universe once more.

'Spooky?' said the Doctor, considering Tegan's question. 'More for them than for me, I imagine. I found it all very interesting and enjoyable.'

'Why should it be more spooky for them?' asked Turlough.

'I knew them all already, don't forget. After all, I'd been them. But to them I must have come as a complete surprise.'

'Hang on a minute,' said Tegan. The complex paradoxes of time travel frequently made her head spin. 'You knew them, because they were all in your past. But they didn't know you, because you were still in their future!'

'Precisely, Tegan.'

Just as she thought she'd got it right at last, the Doctor confused things further.

'Of course, their surprise only lasted for a few seconds. They knew me once we'd met.'

'How?'

'Our minds linked. Then they knew they were me and I was them!'

Tegan groaned and gave up.

'Doctor,' asked Turlough, 'if you've got past selves, does that mean you've got future selves as well?'

'I suppose so – theoretically…'

'Do you think you might meet one of them some day?'

'Oh, I doubt it. That sort of thing doesn't happen very often.'

'Well, I still think it's weird, having other selves at all,' said Tegan.

'Why?' asked the Doctor. 'You've both got them.'

'We have?'

'Not very many of course, because you're both still so

young, bless you.'

'No need to be patronising, Doctor,' said Tegan sharply. 'We can't all be 900 years old, or whatever you are!'

The Doctor grinned. 'Think of yourselves as babies, or as toddlers. Think of yourselves at eleven or twelve. If you could go back and meet yourself – which you must never ever do by the way – you'd find a very different person.'

Tegan thought of herself as a skinny twelve-year old, playing in the red dust with the Aboriginal kids in the baking heat of her uncle's farm in the Outback.

Turlough contrasted the trembling, terrified kid who'd first arrived at Brendon School with his present mature, suave and sophisticated self. He made a vain attempt to adjust his tie before saying, 'I see what you mean, Doctor.'

Tegan still wasn't satisfied.

'If you can meet your earlier selves, why can't we?'

The Doctor sighed. Sometimes Tegan's insistence on strict fairness for all could get a little wearing.

'All time travel creates a disturbance in the space- time continuum, Tegan. With proper supervision and regulation, the disturbances can be kept to a minimum. That's why the Time Lords insist on trying to keep all time travel in their own hands.'

Turlough sniffed. 'That and the fact that keeping a grip on it makes them about a million times more powerful than anyone else.'

'That too,' agreed the Doctor. 'Anyway, temporal paradoxes, like meeting yourself – or selves – create the biggest disturbances of all. They can only be allowed in the direst emergencies.'

'So what was the emergency here?' asked Tegan.

'The emergency was poor old Borusa going mad and

using forbidden time travel knowledge and equipment from the Dark Time. Now it's all been sorted out, they'll be busy in Temporal Control, trying to assess and repair the damage. When this sort of thing happens it takes a tremendous amount of temporal energy to repair it – which means a huge drain on Gallifrey's resources.'

'Exactly who is this Rassilon?' asked Tegan.

'And what was the Dark Time?' asked Turlough.

The Doctor had no wish to discuss the sleazy side of Time Lord history with his companions. Like most Time Lords, he was deeply ashamed of some of the dark secrets in his people's past. *He* knew that their morally superior image was largely a front, but there was no need to spread scandal around the cosmos.

He rose, wandered over to the TARDIS console and began idly punching in co-ordinates. As he'd hoped, the distraction worked.

'What are you doing?' demanded Tegan. 'You treat that thing like a fruit machine. We could end up anywhere!'

'"Ending up" being the operative words,' muttered Turlough.

The recent adventure hadn't been much fun for him. He still resented being trapped in the TARDIS with Susan while methodically murderous Cybermen planted an enormous bomb outside.

'As a matter of fact,' said the Doctor airily, 'our next destination is the same as the last one.'

Tegan looked at him in horror. 'Are you mad, Doctor? You mean we're going back to the Death Zone?'

'The Death Zone was never really our destination, Tegan,' said the Doctor pedantically. 'We were hijacked there. And when that happened we were enjoying a little rest at the

Eye of Orion. I intend to resume our interrupted holiday.'

'Won't they look for us there?' asked Turlough.

'I doubt if they'll be looking for us anywhere, not seriously. They've got too much to do at the moment. Besides… '

Tegan looked suspiciously at him. 'Besides what?'

'As long as I'm still missing Flavia will be Acting-President.'

'So?'

'If she looks for me so hard that she actually finds me, she won't be President any more, will she?'

'I thought the Timescoop had been destroyed – long ago during Flavia's first Presidency,' said Ryoth.

The grey figure beside him actually smiled.

'She gave the task to the Agency – she was a trusting soul in those days.'

'And you decided to keep it instead?'

'It was felt that the device had – potential. Let me show you how it works.'

It didn't take Ryoth very long to master the Timescoop. He had a background in temporal engineering and the basic principles were simple enough.

When he was satisfied that Ryoth had mastered the controls, the grey man from the Agency produced an ornately carved box containing a set of ancient scrolls. He unrolled the first.

'Here are the co-ordinates of the Death Zone. It was sealed off long ago, after the Borusa Affair, but a few savage creatures may have survived.'

'And the other scrolls?'

'They contain spatio-temporal co-ordinates of the home worlds of a number of the Doctor's enemies.'

Suddenly Ryoth saw the flaw in the entire plan. 'The Doctor could be anywhere. How can I attack him if I can't find him?'

His companion touched a control and two monitor screens lit up. One held a complex and ever-changing set of equations. The other showed seven blue lines of varying lengths, with the shortest line, a red one, edging towards the fifth blue one.

'A tracer was placed on the Doctor's TARDIS some time ago. It has now been activated. The screen on the left contains the space-time co-ordinates of the Fifth Doctor. The one on the right shows the current Doctor's tempograph, relayed from Temporal Control.'

'Why the Fifth Doctor?'

The grey man sighed. 'By your own account, the Doctor is almost certainly on the way to meet his fifth incarnation. When you have chosen the enemy you wish to use, you can dispatch it to the Fifth Doctor – ready to ambush the Doctor when he arrives.'

'Suppose it kills the Fifth Doctor first?'

'That is unlikely because of the temporal paradox factor. But even if it did, your purpose would be achieved. If the Fifth Doctor dies – truly dies – the Eighth will never have existed.'

'What is the point of the tempograph?'

'When the red line disappears you will know that the Doctor is dead.'

Ryoth looked curiously at him. 'You're very well prepared.' Then the answer struck him. 'Of course! You were planning to kill the Doctor yourselves!'

'Terminating the Doctor has long been a possible option. But it has not yet been formally sanctioned. So remember

this. If something goes wrong, if you fall into Spandrel!'s hands alive, the plan was yours. You discovered the Timescoop, you set everything up.'

'Nothing must sully the reputation of the Agency, is that it?'

'Nothing must endanger me. This is a rogue operation. If you are caught and keep silent, you may escape with exile. Mention me or the Agency and you will certainly die.'

'How can I mention you? I don't even know your name.'

'Exactly.'

The grey figure stepped into the transmat and disappeared.

Left alone, Ryoth considered for a moment. He knew that what he was doing was incredibly dangerous. It was risky to meddle with the Agency at all. To become involved in an operation set up by one faction of the Agency without official sanction was even more hazardous. But to destroy the Doctor! That was worth any risk.

He set the vision screen of the Timescoop and began scanning the desolate wastes of the Death Zone. It was the simpler of his two options. Since the Death Zone was on Gallifrey it could more easily be reached. Timescooping some alien enemy from its own planet, although possible, was a more complex and time consuming operation, with a greater possibility of error.

He saw something on the screen and adjusted controls to bring it into close-up. It was the twisted, dismembered body of a Cyberman. Ryoth scowled. Perhaps he might still find a living specimen. Or perhaps he could find something even better.

The Doctor had defeated the Cybermen before.

Suddenly he zoomed in on a lonely silver figure. It was

guarding a rocky pass against enemies who had long ago ceased to exist.

'Of course,' whispered Ryoth. 'You would have survived, if anything did. The perfect weapon…'

Feverishly he began a series of complex calculations. Once they were completed he started to manipulate the Timescoop controls. He looked up in anticipation and waited for a fraction of a second. A smile started to form across his face as the silver figure vanished from the screen.

It had been in one place for a very long time and now it was in another place. No doubt this was all part of its Makers' plan. It was not programmed to speculate. Only to kill the Enemy.

It began to survey its new domain. It was on a hill-top – that was good. All around a peaceful pastoral landscape stretched away into the hazy distance, but that was irrelevant. It had no eye for beauty.

Close by were the ruins of an ancient structure – some kind of fortress. They were a useful source of strategic cover.

Satisfied that the place was defensible, it moved into concealment behind a ruined wall and stood immobile, waiting.

The Enemy would come. It always did.

The Enemy, of course, was anyone who came.

The centre column of theTARDIS console slowed in its rise and fall and then came to a halt.

The Fifth Doctor beamed. 'Well, here we are. back in the good old Eye of Orion. The most -'

'I know,' said Tegan. "The most tranquil place in the universe.'

'There's nothing much to do here,' grumbled Turlough.

'Then that's what we'll do,' said the Doctor happily. 'Lots and lots of nothing!'

He opened a wall locker and produced a battered cricket bat and a set of stumps. He put some bails in one blazer pocket, a ball in the other and looked hopefully at his companions.

'Of course, we could always have a game of cricket! I'll bat, Turlough can bowl…'

'And I'll be fielding all day,' grumbled Tegan.

'Oh, come on,' said the Doctor. 'Just a few overs…'

He opened the TARDIS doors and they went outside.

The Doctor stood for a moment breathing in the tranquil air.

'Nothing like the air of the Eye of Orion. It's because of –'

'– the high bombardment of positive ions in the atmosphere,' chorused Tegan and Turlough.

'Oh, have I mentioned that before?'

'Once or twice,' said Turlough.

The Doctor looked at the massive old ruined building. What had it been? A church? A fortress? He wondered about its builders. What had become of them? The Eye of Orion was deserted now. That was part of its charm.

'Now then, where shall we mark out the pitch?' he said happily.

They passed through a massive stone archway and found a flat stretch of ground beside a ruined tower.

'Bit of a bumpy wicket,' said the Doctor. 'Still, it'll do.'

He set up the stumps at one end, carefully laying the bails across the top. Then he paced down the wicket and

set more up at the other end. He offered Tegan the bat.

'Want to open the batting for Australia, Tegan?'

'And face the bowling on a pitch like that? Far too dangerous. That ball's hard, you know.'

The Doctor turned to Turlough. 'You or me, then.'

Turlough fished in his pocket and produced a coin.

'Let's toss for it, shall we?'

'Still got your two-headed Trion ten-credit piece, I see,' said the Doctor amiably. 'We'll use my English half-crown. Heads or tails?'

Turlough chose heads, the Doctor tossed the coin and Turlough won. He took up his position at the wicket and the Doctor walked back behind the bowler's stump. 'Ready Turlough?'

Turlough tapped the crease with his bat and nodded determinedly. 'Do your worst, Doctor!'

The Doctor started his run up and suddenly checked, staring aghast over Turlough's shoulder.

'What's up?' called Turlough, turning to see what the Doctor was staring at with such horrified astonishment.

Some distance away stood a motionless man-shaped silver figure. It seemed to be watching them.

'Keep still,' roared the Doctor. 'Keep absolutely still!'

Ignoring the advice, Turlough leaped for the shelter of the ruined tower. The silver figure swung its arm and a silver javelin flashed past Turlough's body, missing him by inches. He dived into cover and then peered out. The Doctor was standing motionless, his arm still drawn back. Tegan began running towards him.

'No!' yelled the Doctor. 'Don't move!'

The silver figure swung round towards Tegan. As its arm flashed down, the Doctor bowled the fastest ball of his life.

The cricket ball thudded into the silver figure's chest. Although not enough to harm it, the impact was enough to spoil its aim. The second javelin flashed past Tegan as she completed her run and dashed into the tower beside Turlough.

The Doctor joined them with a flying leap.

'Keep down!' he shouted. 'And don't move!'

A hail of silver javelins flashed towards them, whizzing over their heads or striking sparks from the sheltering stone.

The Doctor looked round. They were in a low, circular stone chamber at the base of the tower. Thick walls protected them on all sides. The only gap in their defences was the broken door through which they'd entered.

'Quick,' said the Doctor. 'Grab some of this masonry and barricade the doorway.'

They dragged the chunks of stone that littered the floor across to the doorway and built a hasty barrier.

'All right, that will do,' said the Doctor. 'Now lie down and lie still! Its sensors detect any movement.'

'What is that thing, Doctor?' whispered Tegan.

'A Raston Warrior Robot – the most perfect killing machine ever devised.'

'Can we make it back to the TARDIS?' asked Turlough.

'Back through the archway and across the grass? I doubt it. The Raston Robot moves like lightning. I'm afraid it's got us pinned down.'

CHAPTER 15

BURIDAN'S ASS

'Is it safe to talk, Doctor?' whispered Tegan after a moment.

'I think so, if we keep our voices low. And if you have to move, move slowly. Sudden movement will certainly attract its attention.'

Slowly and carefully, the three captives raised their heads to peer above the barricade.

The robot was standing motionless on a nearby hillock, quite close to them, surveying the surrounding countryside. Its field of view included the TARDIS, just visible through the stone archway, the ruined tower in which they were hiding and all of the route between the two.

Tegan and furlough studied the robot with fascination. It was extraordinary only in its simplicity. It was manshaped, not particularly large, with a body surface of smooth silvery metal. The head was blank, a featureless metal oval. As far as they could see it was unarmed.

'Where does it keep those javelin things it was chucking at us?' asked Tegan.

'Maybe it's run out!' suggested Turlough hopefully.

The Doctor shook his head. 'It extrudes the javelins from its body. Its weapons are all built-in.'

'What is that thing anyway?' asked Turlough. 'What did you call it?'

'A Raston Warrior Robot,' said the Doctor.

'Well, what's it doing here?' whispered Tegan indignantly.

'It wasn't here before.'

'I think someone must have sent it after us. What you might call a particularly nasty practical joke!'

Turlough studied the silver figure in fascination.

'Sent it from where, Doctor?'

'From the Death Zone. Sarah and I encountered it on the way to the Dark Tower.'

'You weren't with Sarah,' began Tegan, and then broke off.

'I was in several places at once, remember.'

'So how did – you and Sarah deal with it?'

The Doctor cast his mind back, struggling to recall the memories of his other self. When a number of his incarnations came together and acted independently, their memories were shared. But to each Doctor, the memories of the others were shadowy, a little dreamlike.

'We didn't. We were pinned down, just as we are now, when a squad of Cybermen turned up.'

'And the Cybermen scuppered the Raston Robot?'

'On the contrary, it was the Cybermen who got scuppered. We managed to slip past during the battle.'

'Are you telling me that thing fought off an entire squad of Cybermen?' demanded Turlough incredulously.

'It didn't just fight them off, Turlough. It massacred them.'

The Doctor closed his eyes, recalling the slaughter. Cybermen staggering back and collapsing, their chest-units exploding as they were pierced by the Robot's javelins. Cybermen with arms and legs and heads sliced off by the sword that suddenly grew from the robot's hand.

'Believe me, they didn't stand a chance,' he concluded.

'Then neither do we,' said Turlough grimly. 'We've got no food, no water… We can't stay hiding here forever. But if we move that thing will kill us.'

'Never say die,' said the Doctor. 'We can't out-fight it, but

perhaps we can out-think it.'

'Where does it come from – originally, I mean?' asked Tegan. 'Who made it?'

'Nobody knows. According to legend, it was created by a race that was old when the Time Lords were young. A race that devoted all its great powers to war and the creation of super-weapons. They vanished without trace – probably destroyed themselves. Unfortunately, they left a few of their weapons behind – like this one!'

'It must have some weak point,' she said.

'It's hard to think of one. It feeds on the atomic radiation in the atmosphere, so it never runs down. It can convert energy into matter. And it moves like lightning. Watch!'

Cautiously the Doctor reached out for a chunk of broken masonry. Leaping up he threw it, not at the robot but at a nearby pile of rubble, and dropped down again.

As the rock clattered on the nibble, the robot instantly fired a javelin at the sound. It stood poised for a moment, then blurred and vanished, reappearing immediately on top of the pile of rubble.It scanned the area for a moment until it was satisfied there was no danger. Then it vanished again, reappearing on top of its original hillock.

There was a moment of horrified silence as the Doctor's companions absorbed what they'd just seen.

'Look, it must know we're here,' said Tegan quietly. 'Why doesn't it just flash over and turn us into pin-cushions?'

'Because we're no threat to it,' said the Doctor. 'It was designed as a guard robot and it's got fixed behaviour patterns. It chooses a patch of territory and defends it – and it interprets all movement as being hostile.'

'Marvellous,' said Turlough bitterly. 'If we attack it'll kill us, if we run away it'll kill us – but we're perfectly at liberty

to sit here and die in our own time.'

'That's about it.' The Doctor was thinking hard. 'What we need is a distraction.'

'Like a squad of Cybermen?' suggested Tegan.

'Anything,' said the Doctor. 'Anything at all.'

In his secret vault, Ryoth was staring impatiently at the Doctor's tempograph. The short red line that represented the Eighth Doctor's still-brief life span was now in close proximity to the line that represented the Fifth. If they had not yet met, they very soon would.

But the red line was still blinking brightly. Ryoth frowned. Why hadn't the Raston Warrior Robot killed him yet?

It didn't take Ryoth long to come up with a possible answer. The robot was reactive. Even if he was trapped, the Doctor would live as long as he could keep still.

Such a situation couldn't go on forever. But pleasant as it was to think of the Doctor suffering a long, lingering death from hunger and thirst, Ryoth just didn't have the patience for it. He needed some other, more aggressively intelligent life-form. Something that would take the initiative.

Turning to the box of scrolls, Ryoth began studying the long list of the Doctor's enemies.

A strange wheezing groaning sound filled the Eye of Orion. The distraction the Fifth Doctor so desperately needed had arrived – in a form he could never have imagined.

The TARDIS blurred and for one awful moment the Doctor thought it was taking off without him. Then the door opened and a tall young man stepped out, looking interestedly about him.

* * *

The Doctor stepped out of the TARDIS surveying the picturesque scene around him. He had barely registered the silver figure posed on its hillock when a young man in a cricket blazer jumped up from behind a wall and shouted, 'Go back!'

Their eyes met and time froze.

The remaining memories of his fourth incarnation and the memories to date of his fifth flooded into the Doctor's mind. The gaps were filling fast now – he was almost himself again. As always, the process was over in moments. He then strode towards the Fifth Doctor, who was emerging from the base of a ruined tower and running towards him.

'How nice to meet you at last!'

'You've chosen a very inconvenient moment – as usual,' said the Fifth Doctor. 'That thing up there is a Raston Warrior Robot and it's got us trapped. As soon as this time bubble breaks you'll be trapped too. I'd advise you to get back in your TARDIS.'

'And leave you all in the lurch? Never!' said the Doctor.

Disregarding the Fifth Doctor's protests, he went over to the ruined tower, where Tegan and Turlough crouched like statues behind the barricade.

'I don't suppose we could get them over to the TARDIS?'

'In a state of temporal stasis? Never!'

'Then I'd better join you.'

The air blurred and shimmered and both Doctors ducked behind the barricade as time resumed its normal flow.

A javelin streaked above their heads, striking the tower wall. Everyone froze, and the robot resumed its motionless vigil.

To Tegan and Turlough, it was as though the Doctor had simply appeared from nowhere. They looked at him unbelievingly.

Forestalling the hail of questions the Fifth Doctor said hurriedly, 'Tegan, Turlough, this is an old – no, a very new – friend of mine. He's called the Doctor too, as it happens and he's come to help us.'

'How?' asked Turlough bluntly.

'I'm sure we can think of something,' said the Doctor. 'After all, two heads are better than one.'

'Even when they're the same head?' said the Fifth Doctor sceptically.

Tegan and Turlough watched as the two Doctors sat staring intently at each other, their minds in telepathic communion.

'Well, I suppose it might work,' said the Doctor dubiously.

'Let's try it then.'

'Buridan's Ass?' said the Doctor.

The Fifth Doctor nodded. 'Buridan's Ass!'

'Risky?'

'Undoubtedly. But it's our only chance.'

To the horror of their companions, the two Doctors rose and began to walk towards the Raston Warrior Robot.

'Equidistant now, mind,' called the Doctor warningly.

'Absolutely! Any divergence and it'll go for the nearer.'

Tegan realised that they were pacing themselves so that they stayed the same distance from each other, and also from the robot. As they got nearer to the robot, they moved nearer to each other, their paths maintaining, what was it called – Tegan racked her brains to recall long-ago geometry lessons – maintaining the shape of a perfect isosceles triangle.

Astonishingly, the robot did not attack either of them.

It swung from one to the other as if about to fire, but never did.

As the Doctors approached nearer and nearer, the robot froze into immobility. Then, clasping its hands to its head in a curiously human gesture, it toppled over, rolling down the hillock to land at the Doctors' feet.

They looked down at it.

'Well, it worked,' said the Doctor.

'It certainly did,' said the Fifth Doctor. He turned towards the tower. 'You can come out now!'

Tegan and Turlough emerged, stretching cramped limbs. They looked down at the prone robot.

'What did you do to it?' asked Tegan.

'I think we gave it a nervous breakdown,' said the Fifth Doctor.

'I know how it feels!'

'Who's this Buridan you were on about?' demanded Turlough.

'Ah, a bit of an old sophist,' said the Doctor, fondly, 'Buridan was a French philosopher in the 14th century who once carried out a rather cruel experiment with a hungry donkey.'

'He placed it exactly between two mangers filled with hay,' continued the Fifth Doctor. 'The poor beast starved to death because it couldn't work out which one to go for.'

'Something similar happened with the robot,' said the Doctor.

'When it's about to attack it locks on to the electrical impulses from its enemy's brain. Now it happens that my brain patterns and those of my friend here are remarkably similar. To the robot it seemed as if it was registering the same target in two places at once. The confusion caused an overload.'

'Temporary or permanent?' asked Turlough.

'I'm not sure,' said the Fifth Doctor thoughtfully.

'Then let's not stay around to find out,' said Tegan practically.

'Seconded,' said Turlough.'

The Doctors looked at each other.

'They're quite right,' said the Fifth Doctor. 'I hate to cut this reunion short, but we'd better be on our way. You first!

The Doctor shook hands with Turlough and took Tegan's hand and kissed it. 'A very great pleasure to meet you again!'

Tegan looked hard at him. 'You two aren't just very alike are you?' she said. 'That wouldn't have fooled the robot. You're both the same!' She looked at the Fifth Doctor. 'Is he that one of your past selves we never met? The one who got trapped in a time loop?'

'Certainly not!' said the Doctor. 'Excellent fellow, though. We met quite recently.'

'Then he's one of your future selves,' said Tegan. 'How does it feel, seeing your future self for the first time?'

The Fifth Doctor smiled. 'To tell you the truth, Tegan, it's a little spooky!'

'I must go,' said the Doctor, shaking hands with himself. 'Goodbye!'

As he turned to go a harsh voice boomed, 'Stop! Do not move!'

They turned and saw a small group of figures grouped on top of the nearby hillock. Squat and dome headed, they all wore space armour. The heavy-duty military blasters they carried were trained on the Doctors and their companions.

Tegan glared at them in irritation. 'Now what? Who the hell are this lot? What are they doing here?'

The booming voice answered her question. 'This territory has now been annexed. You are all prisoners of the glorious Sontaran Empire!'

CHAPTER 16

BATTLEGROUND

Commander Vrag of Sontaran Special Forces surveyed his commando squad with pride. Veterans of over a hundred interplanetary battles, ferocious and ruthlessly efficient, they were everything Sontaran soldiers should be.

This was a great occasion for the squad – another muster at the Sontaran Military Academy. A million cadets were lined up in serried ranks on the city-sized parade ground. No less a dignitary than Admiral Sarg of the Sontaran Space Fleet was to preside over the proceedings.

As part of the opening ceremonies, Vrag's commando unit was to be presented with the Sontaran Medal of Pacification, awarded only to teams who had destroyed at least 10,000 alien life forms.

Lined up beside their sleeping slabs in the immaculate little barrack-dome, the squad stood rigidly to attention, helmets polished, battle armour gleaming.

'March off on my command, lads,' barked Vrag. 'Don't let me down now. The eyes of the future are upon you!' He paused, checking his battle-chronometer. Everything had been timed to the nano-second. 'Squad – forward!'

The squad stepped forward, turned and marched out of the dome in pairs. Outside they formed into fours and marched briskly towards the towering saluting platform, Commander Vrag leading the way.

The blood-stirring, ineffably sweet strains of the Sontaran Anthem pulsed across the parade ground to greet them,

and a guttural cheer rose from a million Sontaran throats.

But then the cheering and the music tailed away as the air around them blurred for a moment and the ecstatic crowds simply disappeared…

Commander Vrag and his men suddenly found themselves marching up a steep slope towards a little hill.

Automatically Vrag roared, 'Squad, halt!'

They halted and Vrag looked around. Behind them the ground sloped away to a green and pleasant expanse of woods and meadows, with a river meandering through. Immune to the scene's beauty, Vrag saw only a clear field of fire and a gratifying lack of opposing military installations. He didn't know where he was, or why, but a Sontaran's duty was always clear – to conquer.

'Battle-readiness, lads,' he ordered. 'Take that hill!'

Drawing their blasters, the squad marched forward. On the other side of the hill they saw the remains of a ruined building.

An oddly-assorted group of alien lifeforms was a grouped around a strange blue box.

Vrag undipped the battle-hailer from his utility belt and raised it to his helmet.

'Stop! Do not move!'

The aliens swung round and stared at him in astonishment, then began talking agitatedly among themselves.

Vrag raised the battle-hailer again. 'This territory has now been annexed. You are all prisoners of the glorious Sontaran Empire!' He turned to his troops. 'Surround them!'

The squad marched down the hill and surrounded the astonished aliens, covering them with their blasters.

Vrag surveyed his prisoners. There were four of them

altogether. Three male humanoids, one with brown cranial fur, the second with yellow. The third humanoid had red cranial fur and appeared less mature. The fourth had short reddish-brown cranial fur and the differently constructed thorax that according to the Sontaran Recognition Manual *Know Your Alien*, marked humanoid females. A metallic figure lay curled up in the grass some way away.

Vrag addressed the brown-furred male humanoid.

'You are natives of this planet?'

'No, just visitors, like yourselves.'

'We are not visitors, we are the advance guard of an invading force. I see you do not know who you are dealing with!'

Commander Vrag took off his dome-shaped helmet, revealing a dome-shaped head, a leathery epidermis, a thin lipless mouth and small, red, burning eyes. These were the features that gave the Sontaran race so distinctive and distinguished an appearance. Every Sontaran was used to the awe inspired in lesser races.

The humanoid female gasped, no doubt expressing admiration. The younger male muttered the name of some native deity.

The other two males spoke together: 'Sontarans!' They sounded resigned, recognising their inevitable defeat.

'We are indeed Sontarans,' said Commander Vrag proudly. 'Resistance is useless!'

'That's what they all say,' muttered the yellow-furred humanoid.

'Tell me,' said the brown-furred humanoid. 'Are you really part of an invasion force, or did you suddenly just find yourselves here without really knowing why?'

Vrag marched up to him, thrusting the blaster under his nose.

'How do you know this? Did you bring us here?'

'Certainly not! Why would we want to do that?'

'Who then?'

It was the brown-furred humanoid who replied: 'You don't imagine we deliberately chose the dubious pleasure of your company, do you? You were brought here by our enemies.'

'Why?'

'Well, knowing your particular temperament, they probably hoped you would kill us.'

'Unless you can come up with a more convincing story, their hopes may well be fulfilled!'

'But don't you see?' said the yellow-furred humanoid. 'Whoever brought you here is your enemy as much as ours. Purely for their own purposes, they've stranded you on a strange planet far from home. If you kill us, you'll be acting like puppets, carrying out their plan.'

Vrag stared at him in bafflement. Neither temperament nor training had prepared him for a situation like this. The Sontaran creed was simple: destroy the enemy. But if you weren't sure who the enemy actually was...

'What are you suggesting?'

'You should ally yourselves with us and help us to defeat our mutual enemy.'

'Sontarans do not ally themselves with inferior alien species,' said Vrag automatically.

'How do you know we're inferior?' asked the female humanoid.

'You are not Sontarans.'

'Of all the stupid, arrogant --

'Never mind, Tegan,' said the humanoid with the yellow fur, wearily. 'Let it go.'

The brown-furred humanoid turned to his friend. 'Nice try – but you ought to know you can't make a Sontaran see reason.'

Yellow-fur shrugged. 'One always has to try.'

'Silence!' bellowed Vrag.

Everyone shut up and stood looking expectantly at him. Uneasily, Vrag realised he had no idea what to do next. He looked around for inspiration, and saw the blue box.

A blue box…

Suddenly Vrag's deep-set red eyes blazed with excitement. Only one of the Sontarans' many enemies was so important that he had an Alien Recognition Manual all to himself. The Doctor!

The Doctor's purposes were often baffling in that he sometimes acted against his own self-interest. Recognition was difficult, since to Sontarans all humanoids looked alike. To make matters worse, the Doctor's appearance sometimes changed.

But just one thing was constant. The Doctor always travelled in a time-and-space craft disguised as a blue box. It was called – it was called the TARDIS!

Capture of the TARDIS, when and wherever encountered, was a top Sontaran priority. Sontaran time-travel capability was extremely limited, based as it was on the osmic projector. With a machine like the TARDIS the universe was theirs. They could go back in time and destroy the Rutan Host before it was spawned.

Commander Vrag saw immortality opening up before him. He had captured the TARDIS – and, presumably, the Doctor as well. His place in the Sontaran Hall of Fame

was assured.

'Which of you is the Doctor?' he snarled.

The two adult humanoids spoke together. 'I am.'

'Do not attempt to deceive me!'

The young male humanoid said, 'Believe it or not, it's true. They both are.'

Unable to deal with the problem, Vrag decided, in true Sontaran fashion, to ignore it.

'No matter. Here is what we will do – *Doctors!* We shall all enter your TARDIS, and you will take me and my troops back to Sontara. There you will be interrogated and we will discover who is who. Co-operate and your lives will be spared. Now move!"

The humanoids all stayed put.

Vrag's mind went back to the manual. Humanoids could often be influenced by indirect pressure applied through their females and through their young.

'Move,' ordered Vrag again. 'Or I shall have the younger humanoids killed – the female first!'

Jabbing a thick finger at three of his troopers he barked, 'You, you and you, execution squad.'

Three troopers broke ranks and lined up before the female, raising their blasters.

'Firing party, take aim…'

The female glared at them, seemingly unafraid.

'All right, we'll go,' said the yellow-furred Doctor. 'Come on, all of you, there's nothing else for it.'

As the group began moving towards the blue box, Vrag noticed the silver form prone in the grass nearby.

'What is that?'

'Be careful,' said the yellow-furred Doctor. 'It's –'

The brown-furred Doctor cut across him. 'It's a servo-

robot – vital to the operation of the TARDIS.'

'Why did he warn me to be careful?'

'It's an extremely complex piece of robotics,' said the brown-furred Doctor loftily. 'Far in advance of anything on your planet.'

'Why doesn't it move?'

'It's in a dormant phase. You can easily rouse it.'

As he spoke he stared challengingly, not at Vrag but at the other Doctor.

Vrag sensed some kind of emotional undercurrent between the two of them, but he was too impatient to bother himself about it. Instead he turned to the nearest trooper. 'Get that thing moving.'

The trooper moved over to the robot and booted it hard in the side. The robot rose in one smooth motion. It extruded a sword from its right arm and sliced off the Sontaran trooper's head, which rolled away across the grass.

The headless Sontaran stood for a moment, the stump of its obscenely thick neck gushing a stinking fluid, and then fell to its knees.

The robot surveyed its astonished enemies for a moment, blurred and apparently vanished.

It reappeared on the far side of the group. Its arm swept down and a metal javelin pierced the probic vent of another trooper, killing him outright…

'Back to the TARDIS!' shouted the Fifth Doctor, starting to run. The Doctor, Tegan and Turlough followed him without hesitation. The Fifth Doctor opened the door and ushered Tegan and Turlough inside, then turned to his other self. 'Are you coming?'

The Doctor said, 'Just a moment. There's no hurry, not now'

He was watching the battle between the Raston Warrior Robot and the commando squad of Sontarans. It was not unlike the battle with the Cybermen his other self had witnessed in the Death Zone. But the present reality was far more ghastly than that memory. Perhaps it was because the Sontarans, for all their squat, troll-like shape, were somehow more human. They were creatures of flesh and blood, and they were being butchered.

The Raston Warrior Robot was everywhere at once. Sometimes it flashed from point to point on the perimeter of the group, bringing down trooper after trooper with its deadly projectiles. At other times it was suddenly in their midst, lopping off arms and legs, and shearing heads from bodies with its sword blade.

The Sontaran troopers fired their blasters wildly, but the Robot was never in one place long enough to form any sort of target. In the swirling confusion of the battle, they succeeded only in killing each other.

It was over at last – or almost. Only Vrag was left on his feet. Five javelins had pierced his body, and his shoulder was bleeding from a sword slash, but he refused to die.

The Raston Warrior Robot appeared beside his swaying form. It drew its sword arm back for the final stroke – and Vrag's great leathery hands sprang out and seized it by the throat. The robot struggled wildly, but Vrag's hands tightened in a death-grip. With a final paroxysm of dying strength, Vrag wrenched the head from the robot's body and hurled it from him.

The headless robot stood swaying for a moment and then toppled over. A moment later Vrag crashed to the blood-soaked ground beside his enemy.

The Doctor ran over, skirting the mangled bodies of the

dead Sontaran troopers. Vrag opened his eyes and saw the Doctor kneeling beside him.

Feebly he gasped, 'I thank you, Doctor.'

The Doctor looked down at him.

'Thank me? Why?'

'You trapped me – but you gave me a true warrior's death. I killed that thing, did I not?'

The Doctor looked at the headless Raston Warrior Robot.

'Oh, yes. If it's any consolation, you won.'

Vrag's thin lips twisted in the rare Sontaran smile. His head fell back.

The Doctor straightened up and saw the Fifth Doctor beside him, looking sadly around at the scene of carnage.

'I suppose all this was necessary.'

'You know it was,' said the Doctor. 'They were prepared to execute Tegan and Turlough. They'd have taken us to Sontara and tortured us for information. Think of the TARDIS in Sontaran hands! We did what we had to do.'

'I suppose so,' said the Fifth Doctor wearily. 'Let's be on our way.' He looked at the pile of slaughtered Sontarans. 'I've rather gone off the Eye of Orion as a holiday resort.'

'We can't leave yet,' said the Doctor. 'There's still something to be done.'

'What?'

'Some unknown enemy has got a fix on me – you – us. They're using some kind of Timescoop to dispatch assorted nasties.'

'Obviously. So?'

'So it's got to be stopped.

'How?'

'I think we should send them a message.'

* * *

Ryoth had lost track of how long he had been labouring over the Timescoop. Yet still the red line on the tempograph showed that the Doctor remained obstinately alive.

'He can't have survived a Raston Warrior Robot and a squad of Sontarans,' muttered Ryoth. 'He *can't*!'

He decided to make one last try. This time whatever he dispatched must be utterly invincible – invulnerable. He began studying the scrolls again. Suddenly he stopped. 'Of course. This really is the perfect choice!'

He started to adjust the controls on the Timescoop once more. A desolate landscape appeared on the screen, a muddy swamp obscured by drifting mists. He scanned the swamp until he found what he was looking for – a line of bubbles. And then, there it was! A monstrous head came roaring out of the mud.

'Now let's see how the Doctor deals with you!' muttered Ryoth.

Tegan and Turlough watched from the TARDIS door – neither wanted to get too far away from it – as the two Doctors set up a complicated-looking piece of machinery on top of the nearby hillock.

Its most conspicuous feature was a set of scanners, shaped like the wings of a giant metal butterfly, which revolved on top of the thing.

The Doctors walked back to the TARDIS and surveyed their work.

'It's a bit of a lash-up,' said the Doctor critically. 'But it should go on working for a while yet. What we need is for our unknown admirer to get impatient and send us another little present.'

'I'm not entirely happy about this,' said the Fifth Doctor.

'It's another trap, isn't it, like with the Sontarans?'

'Purely a defensive measure,' said the Doctor. 'And very necessary. Do you want to spend the rest of your travels wondering which particular old enemy is going to materialise in your lap?' He paused, then nodded. 'Well, neither do I!'

'Any chance of your telling us what that thing does?' asked Tegan.

'It sets up a Temporal Reverse Feedback Field,' said the Fifth Doctor. 'If anyone sends us another surprise package, that little gadget will reverse the polarity of the temporal flow and – '

'Something's happening!' cried Turlough.

The air at the foot of the hill blurred and shimmered and a monstrous creature appeared. It looked rather like a giant worm with a savage, dog-like head and row upon row of teeth. It scented them immediately and began rushing towards them like an express train…

'Drashig!' yelled both Doctors. 'Run!'

Turlough was already inside the TARDIS, but before Tegan and the Doctors had time to follow, the creature shimmered and vanished.

The Doctors heaved a collective sigh of relief. They went up the hill and returned, carrying the gadget between them.

'Well, it worked!' said the Fifth Doctor.

'Just as well,' said the Doctor. 'I must confess, I didn't reckon on a Drashig!'

'Still,' said Tegan uneasily. 'We'd have been safe enough inside the TARDIS – wouldn't we?'

'Don't bank on it,' said the Fifth Doctor. 'Drashigs are omnivores. It would probably have eaten the TARDIS!'

'Come off it, Doctor!'

'They ate a space freighter once,' said the Doctor. 'Mind you, there were several of them.'

Turlough came cautiously out of the TARDIS. 'So, thanks to that gizmo of yours, that horror has gone back where it came from?'

'Not exactly where it came from,' said the Doctor. 'It's gone back to whoever sent it.'

Turlough nodded thoughtfully. 'Someone's in for a surprise.'

Ryoth's surprise was horrifyingly brief. One moment he was alone in the vault, the next the Drashig was suddenly, terrifyingly there…

Ryoth screamed.

The Drashig ate him.

It chomped up most of the Timescoop as well, and then began hurling itself against the too-small door of the vault.

'So, goodbye again,' said the Doctor. He shook hands with his other self, shook hands with Turlough and kissed Tegan's cheek.

'What about you?' she asked. 'Aren't you coming? We can't leave you stranded.'

'You won't. When they're this close, the trans-temporal TARDISes merge. When you leave yours will split off, leaving one for me – I hope!'

The Doctor stepped back and waved goodbye.

The Fifth Doctor's TARDIS dematerialised with the usual sound effects, leaving the Doctor's TARDIS behind. He stepped inside and, a few moments later, his TARDIS too faded away.

'I've never seen anything like it,' Castellan Spandrell told Lady Flavia as they walked along the Capitol corridors.'Security picked up some kind of temporal disturbance in one of those old vaults down below, went down to investigate and then sent for me. When I got down there I found this horrendous monster stuck halfway through the door, screaming and roaring.'

'How very distressing,' said the President. 'What did you do?'

'We rigged up an emergency transmat beam and sent it off to the heart of the Death Zone. Apparently it was something called a Drashig – eats everything. With any luck, it will eat up all the other horrors in the Zone.'

'Did you discover any explanation?'

'Once we'd got rid of the monster, we checked the vault. We found a few metal chunks, later identified as Timescoop machinery, and a few flesh-and-blood scraps that turned out to be what was left of Councillor Ryoth.'

'How very curious…'

'Isn't it?' said Spandrell grimly. 'The official story is that Ryoth was experimenting with an illicit Timescoop and came to a deservedly sticky end. It might even be true – though I doubt it. Ryoth wasn't acting alone. He had help.'

'I'm sure he had. Do you have any theories?'

'Only that Ryoth was involved in some piece of dirty work which backfired on him.'

'Do you think the Doctor was involved?'

'I'm positive,' said Spandrell. 'A Drashig in the Capitol? It's just got to be the Doctor!'

They turned into the Temporal Control Room and found the Chief Controller waiting by the monitor screen. The red line was moving steadily towards the sixth blue one.

'It appears that the Doctor has concluded his business with his fifth self, Madam President, and is now on the way to visit the sixth.'

'So I see,' said President Flavia. 'I wonder what will happen next…'

In the Eye of Orion everything seemed still. Then, in the blood-soaked grass, the torn-off head of the Raston Warrior Robot began rolling gently to and fro. It worked its way slowly across to its body and rested against the stump of the neck. The solid metal flowed like quicksilver, and suddenly the robot's head was back on its body.

It rose and surveyed the stiffening corpses of its enemies.It blurred and vanished, reappearing on top of the little hillock, resuming its unending vigil.

Sometimes a strange thought passed across its consciousness and it wondered if its vigil would ever end, if it would ever know the peace of oblivion.

But it was a Raston Warrior Robot. It only knew how to guard, to fight and to kill.

It did not know how to die.

CHAPTER 17

DEATH SENTENCE

The Trial of a Time Lord was coming to an end. To one of its ends, anyway.

The Time Lord in question, commonly known as the Doctor, was now in his sixth incarnation. He had changed greatly. Gone was the patriarchal dignity of the First Doctor, the puckish charm of the Second, the dashing elegance of the Third. No trace remained of the easy-going bohemianism of the Fourth Doctor, or the gentle dignity of the Fifth.

This Sixth Doctor was someone to be reckoned with – a big, powerful fellow with a tendency to put on weight.He had a roundish face, full-lipped and sensual, with an obstinate chin. Only the jutting beak of a nose recalled earlier selves. The face was crowned with a mop of curly fair hair.

The personality was as powerful as the physical frame. Strength, aggression and anger radiated from him in waves. His clothes reflected all the assertiveness of his nature. Yellow trousers, a multi-coloured coat in which red, yellow, green, purple and pink clashed horribly, a bright red cravat with large white spots. The whole ensemble was finished off with green boots surmounted by orange spats.

The Sixth Doctor stood in the dock in a huge vaulted courtroom. Although it was actually housed in what appeared to be a space station, it had the air of some ancient cathedral.

Opposite him was the Prosecutor's podium, where

stood the lean, malignant, black-clad figure of the Valeyard. Between the two was the bench of the Court Inquisitor – an imperious looking dark-haired female in an ornate headdress, a white dress and a red sash of office.

The rear of the courtroom was dominated by an enormous screen. The screen was linked to the Matrix, the all-encompassing repository in which was stored the experience and knowledge of those Time Lords who had exhausted their regenerations and passed on.

Nor was that all. The Matrix was telepathically linked to the mind of every living Time Lord. Which meant that everything the Sixth Doctor had ever done or said, everything he had ever thought or felt, was available for question and review.

Between the screen and the court officials sat the elaborately-robed Time Lord Jury. Swivel chairs enabled them to watch either the evidence on the screen or the proceedings of the Court.

By now the trial was drawing to a close. There had been much heated discussion, not to say wrangling, between the Doctor, who was conducting his own defence, and the prosecuting Valeyard.

Evidence of the Doctor's past adventures, misadventures and alleged crimes had been shown on the screen. During the process the charges against the Doctor had escalated from conduct unbecoming a Time Lord to genocide – specifically, to the wiping-out of the Vervoids, an intelligent mutated plant species.

The charge had apparently been proved by evidence shown on the Matrix screen.

The Doctor had admitted to the crime, justifying it by the need to save the planet Earth. He also contended that

some, at least, of the evidence against him had been tampered with.

Now, after only the briefest of deliberations, the jury was about to deliver its verdict. A scroll was passed to the Inquisitor. She studied it for a moment and then read it aloud in a firm clear voice:'The verdict of this special Court is that the Doctor is guilty of all charges against him.' She turned to face the Doctor. 'It now falls to me to pronounce sentence. Even the lesser charge of conduct unbecoming a Time Lord, specifically in undue interference in the affairs of other lifeforms, carries severe penalties. But these are now almost irrelevant. The charge of breaching Article Seven, the commission of genocide, carries one mandatory sentence – death.' She paused impressively. 'Doctor, you are sentenced to summary execution for the crime of genocide. The sentence will be carried out immediately.'

The Doctor leaped to his feet. 'That's outrageous. I insist on lodging an appeal!'

'There is no provision for any appeal against the decision of this court,' said the Inquisitor impassively. 'Take him away!'

A squad of guards marched into the room. The two leaders seized the Doctor by the arms and almost dragged him from the Courtroom.

The Valeyard rose. 'With your permission, Sagacity, I shall see that the sentence of the Court is properly carried out.' And with that, he followed the Doctor and his guards from the room.

The Doctor was marched along the ornately decorated corridor by which he'd arrived, and then along a plainer,

more functional one. This corridor led into a cavernous metal-walled open space.

'A docking bay,' said the Doctor, speaking his thoughts aloud. 'Am I going on a journey?'

'I'm afraid not, Doctor,' said the Valeyard mockingly. 'On the contrary, this is journey's end. If you'll be good enough to stand against that wall?'

The Doctor was shoved against a metal wall and the guards lined up in front of him, blasters drawn. The blasters were heavy military models, the Doctor noted, set, no doubt, on 'kill'.

His entire torso would be blown apart, both hearts destroyed.

'Let's do this the traditional way, shall we, Doctor?' said the Valeyard gloatingly. 'Can I offer you a blindfold or a last cigarette? Though I'm sure you don't smoke, it's so terribly bad for the health.'

'So is blaster-fire,' said the Doctor.

The Valeyard smiled. In actual fact, these blasters had been massively augmented. The Valeyard wanted this Doctor dead, but desired his remaining regenerations. This 'execution' was but the first step in his plan.

'Any last words?' asked the Valeyard, rousing himself. 'No? Very well then.' He raised his voice. 'Ready…aim…' He paused, savouring the moment. 'Goodbye, Doctor!'

As the Valeyard opened his mouth to give the final command, a strange wheezing, groaning sound filled the air and a blue box materialised close by.

'The TARDIS has come to rescue me,' murmured the Doctor. 'It'll never work though, they'll shoot me down before I can reach the door…'

The TARDIS door opened and a tall young man with

longish brown hair stepped out. His eyes met the Doctor's and time froze…

All the Sixth Doctor's memories flooded into the Doctor's mind – including, of course, the most recent ones, those of the events that had led to his present predicament.

'Call that a trial?' said the Doctor outraged. 'Genocide? That's absolute rubbish. The Vervoids were a dangerous experiment, not a genuine species. It's all a farrago of preposterous nonsense!'

'I managed to work that out for myself,' said the Sixth Doctor sharply. 'What in the blue blazes are you doing here? I'm in trouble already and you're – we're – committing a major temporal crime. They'll probably add it to my charge sheet.'

'It's a long story,' said the Doctor. 'Several long stories in fact. Look, let's get away from here, shall we, and see if we can make sense of all this chaos?'

The Sixth Doctor looked doubtful.

'Back to the courtroom?'

The Doctor shook his head.

'Back to Gallifrey. Where do you think all this started?' The Doctor indicated the open door of the TARDIS. 'We'd better hurry. I'm never sure how long these time bubbles will last.'

With a final indignant glare at the frozen Valeyard and his equally frozen execution squad, the Sixth Doctor walked across to the TARDIS and disappeared inside.

The Doctor followed and minutes later the dematerialisation noise filled the air. The TARDIS vanished.

So too, surprisingly, did the Valeyard and his guards.

Inside the TARDIS the Sixth Doctor looked around

curiously. It was still his TARDIS, and yet it wasn't, and even the minor changes in decor irritated him.

He wasn't mad about this latest Doctor either. Far too self-assured – and offensively thin.

Hasn't got my dress sense though, thought the Sixth Doctor complacently. Out loud he said, 'So you're my replacement?'

The Doctor looked up from the TARDIS console. 'Not exactly. As I understand it, we're separated by one more incarnation.'

'Just as well. Be a bit embarrassing otherwise.'

The Doctor was still busy at the controls. 'Would it?' he asked absently. 'Why?'

'Never mind.' The Sixth Doctor chuckled. 'There'll be some consternation in the courtroom when the poor old Boneyard tells them I've vanished.'

'I doubt it,' said the Doctor. 'Not if my theory's correct, anyway. As far as they're concerned, you never left and the trial is still going on.'

The Sixth Doctor sighed with exaggerated weariness.'Do you think you might possibly condescend to explain that singularly baffling remark?'

The Doctor grinned at his irascible other self. 'Can you remember what happened in Court immediately before your sentence?'

The Sixth Doctor thought for a moment then frowned. 'Not really – the trial wasn't going too badly, I thought. I flatter myself that I'd presented one or two rather impressive arguments. Then suddenly everything blurred and there I was being sentenced to death and marched off to execution.'

The Doctor nodded. 'I believe the Valeyard was trying to force an alternative timeline. If he'd managed to have you

executed, that line would have become the true one. By rescuing you I destroyed it.'

'Nonsense! The Valeyard is a petty legal official. Temporal manipulation of that kind would be quite beyond him.'

'I think the Valeyard is considerably more that that,' said the Doctor quietly. 'According to your – our – memory of him anyway. Tell me, didn't you find him curiously familiar?'

'No I didn't,' said the Sixth Doctor irritably. 'What are we going to do when we arrive on Gallifrey? March into the President's office and demand an explanation?'

'Yes, we are as a matter of fact.'

'Terrific. As an escaped prisoner, I'll probably be shot on sight!'

'Don't worry, I've got a plan.'

'I'd be interested to hear it.'

'All in good time. Meanwhile think about where you were – before the firing squad business I mean.'

The Sixth Doctor looked puzzled. 'In a courtroom.'

'Yes, but where was the courtroom?'

'I'm not sure. Some kind of space station, wasn't it?'

'Exactly. I took a visual record on my way in.'

The Doctor touched a control and the space station appeared on the scanner screen. For a moment the two Doctors studied it.

The space station was an impressive sight. It hung in space like some vast Baroque cathedral embellished with spires and towers and battlements, surrounded by a huge floating graveyard of wrecked spaceships, lashed by the electric lightning-flares of an unending space storm.

'Extraordinary place,' said the Sixth Doctor. 'I didn't really take it in on my arrival.'

'What's really extraordinary is the fact that you – we – were brought there at all,' said the Doctor.

The Sixth Doctor shrugged. 'I was brought there for my trial.'

'Yes, but why *there*?' persisted the Doctor. 'Why not in the Capitol on Gallifrey – surely that's the only proper place for the trial of a Time Lord?'

'Security?'

'Undoubtedly – but whose?'

'Not mine, certainly!'

The Doctor nodded towards the monitor screen. 'Just look at the place,' he urged. 'It's in a kind of limbo. As far as I can tell, it's not on any established interplanetary routes. It's in an area of perpetual space turbulence, surrounded by the hulks of spaceships, presumably wrecked in the unending storms. A kind of Sargasso Sea in space.'

'A good place to avoid.'

'It most certainly is. And I'll tell you another thing. The bulk of metallic debris around the place and the constant electrical storms would confuse most spaceship scanning systems. Any spaceships that did wander near would probably just register the space wrecks and clear off as soon as they could.'

'I'm a little fed up with playing Doctor Watson to your brilliant Sherlock Holmes,' snapped the Sixth Doctor. 'Would you mind getting to the point?'

'Come on, Doctor, think! Who do we know with the motivation, the resources, and the sheer low-down, deceitful sneakiness to set up a massive well-protected covert base?'

Put like that it was obvious.

'The Agency!'

'Exactly!' said the Doctor. 'Our old friends the Celestial Intervention Agency. And what I want to know is – why are they providing the setting for my trial?'

'A Presidential Inquiry?'

President Niroc was appalled.

He had been looking steadily more horrified ever since the TARDIS had materialised in the ante-room to the Council Conference Room, having apparently bypassed the transduction barriers as though they didn't exist.

Apparently the barriers had mysteriously switched themselves off as the obsolete Type Forty TARDIS arrived, switching themselves on again as soon as it had materialised. The transduction barrier technicians were baffled.

'Rassilon knows what's going on,' said one of them.

'Yes,' agreed his friend. 'He probably does…'

The two Doctors had then marched into the conference room, interrupting a vital meeting of the Inner Council and demanding an immediate interview.

The breach of the Capitol's security had brought the arrival of a squad of the colourfully-uniformed Capitol Guard, slightly too late as usual, and looking, as always, as if about to burst into a rousing chorus.

By then the Doctors had established their joint identity beyond dispute by a brief telepathic mind-link to the President.

It was hard to tell what horrified President Niroc most – the fact that there were two of them or the fact that they were there at all. He sent the guards away, having, at the Doctor's suggestion, suspended the meeting of the Inner Council.

'We have matters of the highest Presidential and State

security to discuss,' said the Doctor mysteriously.' Too sensitive even for the Inner Council itself.'

With much discontented muttering, the elaborately robed members of the Inner Council had filed from the conference chamber, and the President had taken the two Doctors into the luxurious Presidential suite, where he had made an attempt to assert his authority.

Since he was thin, rather ratty-looking and unusually short for a Time Lord, this wasn't easy, but he had done his best.

'All this is most irregular, Doctor – Doctors. You have no right to be here at all – and to be here in two incarnations concurrently…'

'As I'm sure you realise, my Lord President, such an event is only possible in the gravest emergencies. There are, after all, several precedents.'

Niroc gulped. Had the Doctor the backing of some higher authority? Higher even than the Presidency?

'You mean –'

The Doctor held up his hand. 'At this time, we can say no more – can we Doctor?'

'Certainly not,' said the Sixth Doctor sternly, wondering what the Doctor was talking about.

The Doctor didn't know either. He was bluffing as usual, carrying things off with a high hand.

'Very well,' said President Niroc. 'For the moment we will leave the matter of your actual presence aside. What really concerns me is this – *why* are you here?'

'To demand an immediate Presidential Inquiry into my trial.'

'A Presidential Inquiry? An inquiry into an ongoing trial – an inquiry into an inquiry?' Horrified, President Niroc

shook his head. 'Such an inquiry is in the gift of the President alone – and I most certainly refuse.'

'I urge you to reconsider, Lord President,' said the Doctor.

With all the obstinacy of a weak man, Niroc shook his head. 'Why should I listen to you?'

Tired of being a bystander, the Sixth Doctor joined in. 'To begin with, there is a strong possibility that I, not you am Lord President of Gallifrey,' he said calmly.

'How dare you make such a claim?'

'I was informed at the trial that I had been deposed,' said the Sixth Doctor. 'We both know that such a deposition, carried out *in absentia*, is of questionable legality.'

Like the Doctor, the Sixth Doctor was largely bluffing. However, a sudden flicker of alarm in the Lord President's eyes told him that perhaps he might really be on to something. Perhaps I'm still President after all, he thought. He folded his arms and put a noble, Presidential expression on his face.

'The claim is ridiculous,' said Niroc, trying to sound more certain than he felt.

'Even if you oppose the claim,' said the Doctor, 'You will not deny that I am ex-President of Gallifrey?'

'Ex-President, certainly.'

'It is the traditional privilege of an ex-President of Gallifrey,' said the Doctor sternly, 'to summon a Presidential Inquiry, if he is convinced that matters of Gallifreyan security are involved.'

Niroc gaped at him.

'It's quite true,' said the Doctor cheerfully. 'Read the small print. I studied the Presidential Charter one dull afternoon. I think it was intended as a way for ex-Presidents to keep an eye on the excesses of their successors.'

'So you see,' said the Sixth Doctor, 'we can pursue our claim for an inquiry either as ex-President or as President!'

'It's entirely up to you, Lord President,' said the Doctor.

'Of course,' said the Sixth Doctor consolingly, 'when you're deposed you can always set up an Ex-President's Presidential Inquiry!'

Niroc thought hard, but could see no way out.

'Very well, I will order a Presidential Inquiry. It will begin as soon as the trial is over.'

'That will be a little late,' said the Sixth Doctor. 'As soon as the trial is over I will very probably be dead.'

'The inquiry will begin immediately,' said the Doctor.

'But half the High Council are away,' protested President Niroc. 'They're serving as jurors on the Doctor's – on your trial.'

'Excellent!' said the Sixth Doctor. 'Only half a dozen are needed for the Committee of Inquiry – and I should very much prefer to choose from those Time Lords who were *not* selected as jurors at my trial!'

'We shall need a small secure conference room with access to a Matrix screen,' said the Doctor. 'We will also need the use of an office with a data terminal.'

Scowling ominously, Niroc sent for an aide and gave orders that the Doctors were to have whatever facilities they required.

When the Doctors and the astonished aide had departed, President Niroc announced that he was not to be disturbed.

Once the doors were sealed, he went to a corner behind his enormous desk and pressed one of the mouldings in the elaborately-decorated wall-panelling. A panel slid back revealing a concealed, sound-only corn-unit. The President

punched a secret code into the console.

A calm, faintly-inhuman voice said, 'Yes?'

'This is the President.'

The voice seemed unimpressed.

'Why have you called? This unit is for use only in a crisis.'

'This is a crisis. The Ravolox arrangements are in jeopardy.'

'Explain.'

'The Doctor is here – two Doctors. They're demanding an inquiry…'

Niroc poured out the whole story of the Doctors' arrival. When he had finished the voice said, 'Wait,' and the com-unit went dead. The President could imagine the urgent discussions taking place in some secret conference room.

He waited, his panic already beginning to subside. Those he served could deal with the problem of the Doctors. They could deal with anything.

The corn-unit came to life again. 'Niroc.'

'I'm here.'

'Continue to give the Doctor every co-operation in the setting up of his inquiry.'

'But if he starts asking questions about –'

The cold voice cut him off. 'The Doctor's inquiry will never take place.'

'What are you going to –'

'Obey instructions. Measures will be taken.'

'What measures?'

'You have no need to know.'

The corn-unit went dead and the President closed the secret panel. He took his place at his desk and let his staff know that he was once again available for Presidential affairs.

His panic had completely subsided now. Let the Doctors

set up their ridiculous inquiry. They would never live to see its end.

Indeed, given the ruthless efficiency of his unseen masters, they might not even live to see it begin.

CHAPTER 18

FLAVIA

The Presidential aide detailed to look after the Doctors was a stiff-necked and aristocratic young Time Lord called Plinoc. It soon became apparent that he owed his post to his high-ranking social position rather than to his intelligence or his charm.

Plinoc listened to President Niroc's orders with horrified disbelief, regarded the two Doctors, especially the Sixth Doctor with deep distress and said curtly,'Follow me, please.'

He took them to a small, luxuriously-furnished office just off the Presidential suite.

The Doctor regarded it with approval. Perhaps this young fellow was more efficient that he appeared.

'Excellent,' said the Doctor. 'Exactly what we need, first try. Well done!'

Plinoc smiled thinly at this young upstart's naivety.

'I'm afraid you are under a misapprehension, Doctor. Finding the accommodation you have requested is going to be very difficult. The Capitol is terribly overcrowded already. Perhaps somewhere on the outer periphery.'

'Then what's this place?' demanded the Sixth Doctor.

'This is, in fact, my office.'

'Not, in fact, any more it isn't,' said the Doctor. 'We're taking it over. Just you go off and find us a suitable conference room for the Presidential Inquiry.'

'Oh, and we should like some refreshment sent in as soon as you can,' said the Sixth Doctor. 'Wine, pasties,

cakes, cold meats, a few puddings and syllabubs and so on. The best of everything will do.'

'I must protest –'

'I shouldn't bother,' said the Doctor. 'You heard the President say we were to have whatever we wanted. Well, at this particular moment in time, as they say, your office is exactly what we want!'

'And the refreshments,' said the Sixth Doctor. 'Don't forget the refreshments!'

They bustled the still-protesting Plinoc out, then, the Sixth Doctor went over to the data terminal in the corner.

'We'd better start selecting our committee. There must be some honest Time Lords left on Gallifrey.'

As he spoke a small, neat, determined-looking Time Lady hurried into the room. She stopped short at the sight of the Doctor, hesitating for a moment. 'Doctor?'

They exchanged the brief moment of mind-touch that courtesy required in such situations.

'Doctor, it is you! I couldn't believe it when they said you were back!' She studied the Doctor affectionately for a moment. 'Another regeneration, I see. Very wise of you. I thought the last was a little – vivid. This one however has been most successful. I've seldom seen you look better, Doctor.'

'Thank you, Lady Flavia. A great pleasure to see you again.' The Doctor took her outstretched hand and kissed it. 'You, of course, are as lovely as ever.'

'It's me as well,' said the Sixth Doctor, emerging from behind the data terminal. He sounded rather hurt. 'In fact, I was me long before I was him!'

Flavia stared open-mouthed at the colourful figure before her. There was another moment of mind-touch –

with the same result – before she sank into one of the guest chairs.

'You're both the Doctor. This is highly irregular, even for you! I know there are precedents, but those took place in cases of the most extreme emergency –'

'This is an emergency,' said the Doctor. 'Something is rotten in the state of Gallifrey.'

Lady Flavia was silent for a moment.

'I cannot deny that what you say is true, Doctor. It has been hard for me to speak out. As a deposed President myself, my motives might be questioned.'

'Not by us,' said the Sixth Doctor. 'What's been going on here?'

'I scarcely know where to begin, Doctor.'

The Doctor produced one of his favourite quotations from the literature of his favourite planet. '"Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end; then stop." Go back to the last time you had more than one of us to deal with.'

Lady Flavia collected her thoughts, then began.

'As you know, Doctor, I was rather pitchforked into the Presidency when President Borusa's mysterious disappearance was followed by your own precipitate departure from Gallifrey.'

The Doctor looked abashed and murmured an apology.

Flavia waved it aside. 'As it happened, things worked out surprisingly well. I served for some time and achieved much. People and Council alike were content, and Gallifrey prospered. Then I became aware of – murmurings.'

'What kind of murmurings?' asked the Doctor.

'It was said that I had never been properly elected, that it was time to give the High Council a proper choice. At first the complaint seemed reasonable. I had assumed the

Presidency in irregular circumstances on a temporary basis. Through long use I had come to think of the office as my own by right.'

'So what did you do?' asked the Sixth Doctor.

'I resigned the Presidency and offered myself for re-election.' Flavia smiled wryly. 'To be honest with you I saw it as a formality, a way to regularise my position. I hoped – I *expected* – to serve Gallifrey as its President for many more years.'

'Why shouldn't you?' asked the Doctor. 'If the High Council and the people were happy with your term in office.'

'Be that as it may, Doctor, I was defeated. Defeated and deposed. Niroc, a complete nonentity, was elected by an overwhelming majority.'

'How could that happen?' asked the Doctor.

'I can tell you how,' roared the Sixth Doctor. 'Fraud, chicanery, jerrymandering and jiggery-pokery. Typically unscrupulous Time Lord tactics. Isn't that so, Lady Flavia?'

'There were those who thought so – myself among them to be honest. But nothing could be proved.'

'So what happened next?' asked the Doctor.

Flavia shrugged. 'Niroc became President and packed the High Council with his supporters. As an ex-President I retain my place by right, but I am completely isolated.'

The Doctor brooded for a moment, then asked, 'Lady Flavia, before the rumours began, did anything in particular happen?'

Flavia frowned. 'I'm not sure what you mean, Doctor.'

'Was there any particular problem, any crisis in Presidential or High Council affairs that concerned you?'

Flavia frowned, thinking back. 'There was one…'

'Well?'

'It concerns a matter of State security, something about which the utmost secrecy must be maintained at all times. I'm not sure it is proper for me to tell even you.'

'Good grief!' exploded the Sixth Doctor. 'If you're not prepared to trust us…'

'Lady Flavia, we can't help you, or ourselves, unless you trust us completely,' said the Doctor gently.

Flavia considered, and then made up her mind. 'Very well. There were rumours – nothing more than rumours – that the secrets of the Matrix were no longer safe. That high-grade technological information was being stolen.'

'Who brought you these rumours – the Agency?'

Flavia shook her head. 'It was the Capitol Guard – they have a small Intelligence Division of their own. I checked with the Agency and they poured scorn on the whole idea. The security of the Matrix, they assured me, was under their charge and it was impregnable as always.'

'Did you learn anything further?'

"The Capitol Guard told me that one of their agents, operating off-planet, attempted to send back a message. Transmission was broken and only one word got through – "Ravolox".'

The two Doctors exchanged glances.

'And after that?' asked the Doctor.

'After that I was deposed and had no access to information of any kind. Niroc closed down the Capitol Guard Intelligence division. He set up a Secret Security Committee, from which I was excluded.'

The Doctor nodded thoughtfully. 'Something for the inquiry to look in to!'

'What inquiry?' asked Flavia.

'We haven't set it up yet,' said the Sixth Doctor. 'Lady Flavia, has Niroc got all the High Council in his pocket?'

'Nearly all. There are about a dozen Independents – just for the look of things – Time Lords considered too old, too weak or too stupid to pose any real threat.'

'Five, plus you, is all we need!' said the Doctor.

'Need? What for?'

'To set up a Committee of Inquiry.'

The Sixth Doctor helped the astonished Flavia to her feet.

'Be kind enough to come over to this terminal, Lady Flavia, and tell us exactly who these Independents are…'

Sitting with their feet up on the desk, the Doctors beamed at each other.

With Flavia's help they had reviewed the background of the few remaining Independents on the High Council and selected the best of an undistinguished lot. All necessary arrangements had been made and the Committee of Inquiry was due to begin sitting very shortly. Flavia had gone off to talk to the chosen group, and to rally them for the task ahead.

Since then the Doctors had polished off several plates of assorted Gallifreyan delicacies.They were both holding silver goblets filled with Rassilon's Red, Gallifrey's finest vintage.

'I think things are going rather well,' said the Sixth Doctor. 'We make quite a good team.'

'You certainly picked up all your cues very skillfully in the President's office,' said the Doctor. 'Threatening to reclaim the Presidency was a masterstroke.'

'Oh, I'm not nearly as stupid as I look,' said the Sixth Doctor cheerfully. 'We can't all be willowy and sensitive,

you know.' His expression became suddenly serious. 'There's one thing worrying me.'

'Only one?'

'You said in the TARDIS that as far as the people in the court were concerned, the trial was still going on.'

'That's right.'

'Well – am I there?'

'Oh yes.'

'How can I be there and here as well?'

'You split off from that self when I took you out of the Valeyard's false time line.'

'Well, which is me?'

'Both. I'm you as well, remember.'

'That's easier to take somehow. At least you don't look like me. What's going to happen – to my two selves, I mean?'

'If I can get the two of you back together in the right time and place, your two selves will merge.'

'And if you can't?'

'Who knows? Maybe one of you will disappear. Maybe both will. Or maybe you'll have to get used to life as a twin!'

'Thanks very much! That makes me feel a lot better!'

'Don't mention it,' said the Doctor blandly.

Reluctantly the Sixth Doctor grinned. He reached for the wine flask and poured more wine for them both.

'Ah, well! Here's to all three of us!'

Despite their differences, a liking was gradually growing up between them. The Sixth Doctor was coming to realise that this over-elegant, too-thin young man was much tougher than he looked, while the Doctor now recognised that there was more to his earlier self than the overbearing exterior suggested.

At that point, Plinoc, the Presidential aide whose office they'd taken over, appeared in the doorway and bowed stiffly.

'The Committee of Inquiry is assembled and ready to begin.'

The Doctors stood up, drained their wine in a silent toast and followed him from the office.

The Doctor looked around cautiously as they followed Plinoc along endless marble corridors lined with statues of Time Lord dignitaries. He slowed his pace, letting the aide go ahead.

'They're cutting it rather fine,' he said quietly.

The Sixth Doctor looked puzzled. 'Cutting what rather fine?'

'The assassination attempt.'

'What!'

'You don't imagine they actually intend to let us hold this inquiry do you?'

'Niroc wouldn't have the guts to try anything like that.'

'Niroc's backers would,' said the Doctor grimly.

'What backers?'

'How do you think such a little runt got to be President? Niroc's a front. Come to that, most of the Inner Council are fronts. Look at those people we reviewed for the Committee of Inquiry. Did you ever see such an undistinguished lot?'

'They weren't very impressive,' agreed the Sixth Doctor. 'Even for politicians…'

Plinoc noticed that his charges were falling behind, so he stopped and waited for them to catch up.

'Nice to be back in the Capitol,' said the Doctor blandly.

'Too stuffy for me,' said the Sixth Doctor. 'I always feel as

if I'm about to belch or knock over a priceless work of art – oops!' He brushed against a bust of President Borusa, steadying the pedestal before it toppled. 'Mind you, we had some fun with the Outsiders, didn't we, when we were young. I'd like to attend a Shobogan feast again one day.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'All right for you, young fellow. I'm getting too old for that kind of thing. These days I'd probably start to weaken after the fifth flagon of Best Old Shobogan.'

'Talking of Shobogans,' said the Sixth Doctor. He pointed along the corridor to where a small group of large, shaggy, skin-clad men were being marched towards them at blaster-point by a couple of Capitol Guards.

The Doctor tapped the aide's shoulder. 'What's all that about?'

'Shobogan rebels,' said Plinoc, twisting his lip in disgust. 'Filthy brutes. There was a big round-up recently.'

The Doctor frowned. 'Rebels? I don't remember Shobogans doing anything much more politically conscious than getting drunk and shooting out street lamps.'

'Things are worse now,' said Plinoc. 'Much worse. We've had to put quite a lot of them in prison, right here in the Capitol.'

'Locking up a Shobogan is the worst thing you can do,' said the Doctor indignantly.

'Shobogans are harmless enough,' agreed the Sixth Doctor. 'You just have to know how to handle them. Get drunk a few times, have a few fights. You'll soon have them eating out of your hand.'

'Or biting it off!' said the Doctor.

Plinoc shuddered delicately. 'One can scarcely envisage mixing with such creatures socially.'

'You want to get out of the Capitol a bit more, Plinoc,' said the Sixth Doctor. 'Attend a few Shobogan feasts. I tell you, they're pussycats when you get to know them.'

As if to belie his words, there was a sudden explosion of activity ahead and the advancing group dissolved into a whirling tangle of Shobogans and Capitol guards.

The Doctor watched the struggle for a few minutes land then looked round for Plinoc, the aide. He had mysteriously vanished.

'Ought we to help?'

The Sixth Doctor grinned. 'Help whom? I'm with the Shobogans.' An idea struck him. 'We could each take one side. I'll play for the Shobogans, you play for the Guards. That'd be fair!'

'Look, they're trying to take the Guards' blasters.'

'Then let 'em!'

They were standing beside a rather fine statue of Rassilon. Suddenly its head exploded, showering them with dust and marble fragments.

Shoving the headless remains of the statue out into the corridor, the Doctor ducked back into the statue's empty alcove, pulling his other self with him.

'You might want to rethink that attitude.'

'Why should I?'

A blaster bolt seared the wall above them.

'They've *got* the Guards' blasters now,' said the Doctor.

'So?'

'So they're shooting at us!'

The Sixth Doctor glared indignantly down the corridor. By now the disarmed guards were disappearing into the distance. The freed Shobogans were using their blasters to shoot not at the fleeing guards but at the two Doctors.

The Sixth Doctor refused to believe the evidence of his eyes.

'The Shobogans would never shoot at me. We're friends.'

He stepped out of the alcove waving his arms. 'Stop that shooting at once. It's the Doctor!'

A bolt of blaster-fire scorched the tangle of his curly hair.

'Get down!' yelled the Doctor.

The Sixth Doctor did no such thing. With a roar of rage, he hurtled down the corridor, blaster-fire crackling all around him. By some miracle, he reached the little group of Shobogans unscathed, crashing into them like a ball hitting skittles in a bowling alley. The Sixth Doctor and most of the Shobogans went down in a struggling heap.

The Doctor took advantage of the cease fire caused by the Sixth Doctor's impact and sprinted down the corridor to join in the fray.

The biggest of the Shobogans, a massive red-bearded man who seemed to be their leader, was still on his feet. Blaster in hand, he was staring down at the tangle of wildly-struggling bodies at his feet and yelling orders, obviously trying to get a clear shot at the Sixth Doctor.

The Doctor reached out a long arm and grabbed the big Shobogan at the junction of neck and shoulder, strong fingers digging deep into the heavy muscles. The brawny arm went limp, and the Doctor grabbed the blaster and stuck it into the Shobogan's ear.

'You, what's your name?'

'Kagar,' growled the giant.

'Are you the leader?'

'I suppose so.'

'Tell them to stop fighting. Tell them to get up!'

Kagar bellowed orders in a thick, guttural voice and the

pile of bodies disentangled itself, revealing the Sixth Doctor, looking considerably the worse for wear, at the bottom. He seemed to be quite unhurt however, and scrambled quickly to his feet, snatching the second stolen blaster from the Shobogan who held it.

He made an attempt to straighten his clothing with his free hand, tugging at his cravat, which had ended up under his ear.

'That was an incredibly rash thing to do,' snapped the Doctor.

'Charging a bunch of Shobogans? Nothing to it!'

'They had blasters at the time, remember!'

'Yes, but everyone knows Shobogans can't shoot straight. Running straight at them when they're firing at you is much the safest thing to do.'

Tossing the second blaster to the Doctor, he grabbed the big Shobogan leader by the front of his greasy fur jerkin and started shaking him violently to and fro.

'How *dare* you shoot at me? What do you think you were doing? Didn't you hear me say I was the Doctor? Haven't I always been a good friend to your people?'

'He can't very well answer till you stop shaking him,' pointed out the Doctor acidly.

Reluctantly, the Sixth Doctor released the Shobogan leader, who stood there gasping.

'You are the Doctor?'

'Yes I am! And as a matter of fact, so is he!'

'Our people still speak of you,' said Kagar. 'If we'd known it was you, we'd never have agreed to kill you.'

'Who asked you to kill us?' snapped the Doctor.

Kagar shrugged. 'Some Time Lord.'

'What did he look like?'

'White face, white robe. All look alike.'

'When did this happen? Where? '

'Just now, in prison. He said guards would bring us along here. When we see you, we jump the guards. They just pretend to fight, let us take their blasters, run away. Then we shoot you and escape to the Outlands. They'd got us locked up for being rebels. Your deaths in exchange for our freedom. Seemed like a good deal!' He shrugged. 'So that's what happened – well, nearly!'

The Doctor looked at his other self. 'You've got to admit it's neat. We're given every co-operation, the Inquiry is about to start, and then some Shobogan prisoners just happen to escape, steal their guards' blasters and somehow we get shot in the confusion. Nobody's fault, just one of life's little tragedies.'

'It's got Agency written all over it,' said the Sixth Doctor.

The Doctor indicated the bemused Shobogans. 'What do we do with this lot?'

The Sixth Doctor jabbed Kagar in the chest. 'You! Clear off!'

'We go?'

'Just as quick as you can. Don't try to get out of the Capitol, they'll be checking the gates. And keep well clear of the Capitol Guards.'

The Shobogan leader grunted. 'Sure. Not going back to prison.'

'What were you doing in prison anyway?'

'I told you – they call us rebels. This Council make too many new laws. Too much interference. The Shobogans are a free people.'

'If the guards find you now, they won't just lock you up, they'll kill you,' warned the Doctor. 'You know too much.'

The Shobogan leader said, 'We'll hide out in Low Town. Our thanks, Doctor. If you ever feel like a drink of Old

Shobogan, they serve a good flagon at the Golden Grockle.'

He enfolded the Sixth Doctor in a bear-like embrace, giving him a whiskery kiss on both cheeks, before advancing on the Doctor, who stepped back hurriedly.

'Off you go – and hurry! There'll be more guards here soon.'

The Shobogans disappeared down the corridor.

'What now?' asked the Sixth Doctor.

'We wait for the guards.'

'What makes you so sure they're coming?'

'Someone will be arriving to discover our bodies.'

The someone turned out to be Plinoc, who returned with a squad of armed guards. He looked astonished to see the two Doctors, but he made a good recovery.

'Thank goodness you're both all right. I saw what was happening and went off to get help.'

'You even went to get help before anything happened,' said the Doctor. 'Positively prescient!'

'It's almost as if you knew what was going to happen in advance,' said the Sixth Doctor. He loomed menacingly over the terrified aide. 'Or rather, what was supposed to happen!'

The Guard Captain marched over and saluted.

'Are you both all right?'

'Perfectly, thank you,' said the Doctor.

'We received a report that a gang of armed Shobogan rebels was roaming the Capitol. We've orders to shoot on sight.'

'Those orders are countermanded,' said the Sixth Doctor.

'The Shobogans are not armed.' He nodded to the Doctor who handed the two blasters to the astonished Guard Captain, who passed them over to his sergeant.

'If you find the Shobogans now, you can recapture them without risking much more than a black eye,' said the Sixth Doctor encouragingly.

The Doctor said, 'I want you to find the two guards who were escorting the Shobogan prisoners. Arrest them for negligence of duty. Then ask who told them to move the prisoners and exactly what orders they were given. I shall expect a full report. Is that clear, Captain…'

'Captain Vared, sir. May I ask on what authority?'

'I am conducting a Presidential Inquiry.' He nodded to the aide. 'The Presidential aide here will confirm that my orders have the backing of the President.'

Plinoc nodded reluctantly. 'Obey the Doctor's orders.'

Captain Vared saluted and marched his men away.

As he watched them go, the Sixth Doctor said, 'How far do you think the good captain will get with his inquiry?'

'Nowhere, probably. They'll have cleaned up any evidence already. I doubt if those two guards who conveniently lost their blasters will ever be seen again.'

'What's the point then?'

'As long as someone's asking questions, it'll make our opponents uneasy. And it lets the enemy know we're on to them.'

'Well, mustn't keep our own inquiry waiting any longer,' said the Sixth Doctor, turning to Plinoc. 'Lead on!'

'I must find a corn-unit and send a message to the President,' said the aide hurriedly. 'He heard reports of the trouble and he's been very worried about you.'

He started to move away, but the Sixth Doctor's hand clamped down on his shoulder.

'Let's give the President a pleasant surprise, shall we?'

His voice hardened. 'I said, lead on!'

CHAPTER 19

INQUIRY

The worried aide led them along more corridors, turned off down a smaller side-corridor and paused before a set of double doors.

'I'll just tell the President you're safe.'

'No need to announce us,' said the Doctor, brushing him aside.

The two Doctors entered the conference room. Small and luxuriously-decorated, it contained a large, oval table with high-backed chairs arranged round it. A Matrix screen occupied one wall. President Niroc, Lady Flavia and the five other Time Lords selected for the Presidential Committee of Inquiry were seated. The two chairs between President Niroc and Lady Flavia were empty.

President Niroc, his back to the door, was addressing the Committee.

'I scarcely need to say how tragic it is that this vital inquiry, to which the resources of my office were totally committed, should be so sadly ended before it has begun.'

'You don't need to say it at all, my Lord President,' said the Doctor cheerfully. 'We're here and raring to go!'

Lady Flavia's face lit up.

'Doctor – Doctors. You're all right! We heard you'd been killed.'

'The reports of our death were greatly exaggerated,' said the Sixth Doctor.

As the Doctors took their places, the Sixth Doctor rapped

sharply on the polished machonite surface of the table.

'Shall we begin?"

The Doctor looked around the assembled group. As Flavia had warned him, some of the Time Lords were old, some were dim and some were both, but at least they were honest.

'First let me thank you all for agreeing to take part in this inquiry at such short notice. I assure you that its importance justifies the inconvenience to which you have all been put.'

'You were always a smooth talker, Doctor,' muttered an incredibly ancient Time Lord at the far end of the table. 'Why not get to the point?'

'With pleasure, Co-ordinator Engin,' said the Doctor.

'Not Co-ordinator any more. They said I was past it when Lady Flavia here was still President, put in some new young whipper-snapper. Even changed the job title – Co-ordinator not good enough any more – it's Keeper now!'

The Doctor bowed his head in acknowledgement. It had been a good idea to put old Engin on the Committee of Enquiry, he thought to himself. Ancient as he was, his intelligence burned bright as any laser-beam, and his knowledge of the Matrix was unrivalled.

The Doctor continued his opening address.

'We are here, as the Lord President rather wittily put it, to inquire into an inquiry. To be specific, into my trial, which is taking place even as we speak.'

'I was not aware that the Doctor was again on trial,' said Lady Flavia. 'Nor I think, were any of us. Why was the Council not informed, Lord President?'

'I must decline to answer that question on the grounds of State security.'

'Come, come, Lord President,' said the Doctor mockingly. 'By virtue of your position you are Chairman of this inquiry. It speaks with your voice. You can scarcely refuse to answer your own questions.'

'Very well,' snapped Niroc irritably. 'The decision to try the Doctor was taken by the SSC.'

'I'm sorry?' said the Doctor politely.

'The Secret Security Committee – an inner group of the Inner Council.'

'Was the Celestial Intervention Agency involved?'

'The SSC liaises with the Agency on security matters.'

'So they were involved?'

'In a sense, yes.'

'Did the initiative come from them?'

'I'm not sure what you're getting at…'

'*Was it the Celestial Intervention Agency's idea to put me on trial?*'

Such was the authority in the Doctor's voice that President Niroc was compelled to answer honestly for once.

'Well, in a way, yes…'

'Thank you, my Lord President.'The Doctor paused. 'My next question is a very simple one. Why?'

President Niroc made no reply.

'Why?' thundered the Doctor. 'I have roamed the cosmos for several regenerations by now. I have done little harm and on occasion, a certain amount of good in the universe. I submitted to a sentence of exile and was freed in recognition of services to Gallifrey. I have done other services since then – I might mention the Vardan/Sontaran invasion, the return of Omega, the Borusa affair… On occasion I have even held, however briefly, the supreme

office of President of the High Council.' He paused dramatically. 'I know that my relationship with Gallifrey, and with my fellow Time Lords has been uneven and, at times, tempestuous, but I had hoped that in recent times we had achieved an equilibrium – that my services to Gallifrey balanced, perhaps even outweighed, my sins.'The Doctor looked around the table. 'I appeal to all fair-minded Time Lords here. Is not that a reasonable statement of the position?'

There was a moment or two of silence.

Then old Engin muttered, 'You were always a wild and reckless young fellow, Doctor, but there's no real harm in you. And you saved us all when Goth and the Master murdered the President and tried to take over Gallifrey.'

'You do yourself less than justice, Doctor,' said Lady Flavia. 'If the record is scanned in full, it will certainly show that your many services to Gallifrey, those to which you have just referred, and many others, and, indeed, your services to the universe, far outweigh any minor – irregularities.'

There was a murmur of assent.

The Doctor bowed his head, genuinely moved.

'Thank you.'

But not all his audience were with him.

'I really must protest, Doctor,' said President Niroc acidly.

'You insisted on calling this inquiry. So far you have used it only to interrogate *me*, your President, and to make speeches of self-glorification.'

'With respect, Lord President, my purpose in this inquiry is to discover the truth. I can only do that if I question those I believe to have the answers. As for self-glorification, I deny the charge. Self-justification, yes.' He paused once

more. 'After all, what I seek is – justice!'

There was another murmur of applause. The Doctor hurried on: 'Now, as my first witness, I should like to call – myself!'

He looked across the table. 'Doctor?'

The Sixth Doctor roused himself with a start. He tended to lose interest when someone else was doing all the talking – even when that someone was his other self.

'Yes?'

'On the whole you would agree with my proposition?'

'What proposition was that?'

The Doctor gritted his teeth. 'That although you might not be regarded as Gallifrey's favourite son, you had no reason – and indeed there was no good reason – to suspect that you were seen as some kind of cosmic criminal?'

'Absolutely – I mean, absolutely not!'

'Please describe what happened to you?'

'I was kidnapped – taken out of time – and put on trial.'

'On what charge?'

'Conduct unbecoming a Time Lord – in other words, they were raking up the tired old charge of meddling. The one I'd already served time for, when I was exiled to Earth. They weren't getting far with that so they soon trumped up a better one – genocide.'

'Where did – or rather, where *is* – this trial taking place?'

'I'm not sure. Not here on Gallifrey, certainly. On some kind of space station, way out in the void.'

The Doctor addressed the Matrix screen. 'Please show the venue for the Doctor's trial.'

The screen remained blank. An inhumanly clear female voice said, 'Venue classified. Presidential authorisation needed.'

The Doctor fixed President Niroc with a stern glance.

'Lord President?'

'I cannot see that this information is really necessary –'

'On the contrary, it is the first and most vital point in my enquiry. If you please, Lord President?'

President Niroc looked around the table and saw that everyone was returning his gaze expectantly.

'Authorised,' he muttered.

'Insufficient volume. Please repeat.'

'*Authorised!*' snarled Niroc.

There was a brief pause, then the voice said, 'Authorisation by Presidential voiceprint confirmed.'

The space station that was the venue for the Doctor's trial appeared on the screen in all its unlikely Baroque glory.

Instantly the Doctor snapped, 'Confirm installation history and present status.'

He was hoping that the Presidential authorisation would cover this second question as well – and for a time his hopes were confirmed.

'Space station Zenobia, now disused,' said the voice. 'Purchased by Celestial Intervention Agency with secret funds and moved to storm belt in the intergalactic void.'

'Purpose?'

'To be used as covert HQ for Operation Ravolox –'

President Niroc was on his feet. 'Authorisation cancelled!' he screamed.

The screen went blank.

President Niroc fell back into his seat.

The Doctor continued as if there had been no interruption: 'Your visit to Ravolox was produced in evidence during the trial, wasn't it, Doctor?'

'It was,' said the Sixth Doctor. 'I always wondered why.

I thought I performed rather well there. I stopped a black light explosion that would have caused a chain reaction that might have ended the universe and helped to free an underground tribe being oppressed by an extremely unfriendly robot.'

'What was the robot's purpose?'

'Originally to care for what its helpers called the Three Sleepers from Andromeda. I believe they were astronauts in suspended animation, waiting for a relief expedition. The expedition never turned up and the sleepers died. The robot just went on ruling through force of habit. Oh, a crook called Sabalom Glitz turned up on the planet as well, after what he called "the stuff".'

'Which was?'

The Doctor noticed President Niroc shifting uneasily in his seat at this point.

The Sixth Doctor shrugged. 'Something enormously valuable – and top secret. When we got to that bit in the playback, the Valeyard stopped the tape.'

President Niroc relaxed.

'Was there anything else significant about Ravolox?'

'It had an incredible similarity to the planet Earth – extending to a buried underground transportation station called Marble Arch. Of course it couldn't have been Earth, it was light years out of place.'

'Are you intending to take us through the entire trial, Doctor?' asked President Niroc.

'Only very briefly, Lord President.' He turned back to the Sixth Doctor. 'I gather that more of your exploits were replayed in an attempt to discredit you?'

'Yes, but only in a corrupt and twisted form,' said the Sixth Doctor indignantly. 'For example, I was accused of

betraying my companion Peri on Thoros-Beta and abandoning her to an alien mind-transplant. When I myself tried to introduce an adventure on the space ship *Hyperion III* in my own defence, I was falsely shown smashing up the ship's communication equipment – something I had no reason to do, and would never have done! For destroying the Vervoids, an artificially created race of vegetable parasites that could have wiped out all animal life on earth, I was actually accused of genocide!'

'You maintain that the evidence of the Matrix was tampered with?'

'I most certainly do.' The Sixth Doctor's voice rose in both passion and volume. 'Much of it was severely distorted, some was totally false.'

'This is arrant nonsense, Doctor,' said President Niroc. 'Everyone knows that the integrity of the Matrix is unquestionable. Whatever it replayed at the trial *must* have happened, whether you admit it or not!'

A creaking old voice spoke from the end of the table. 'Not necessarily.'

The Doctor turned quickly to the speaker.

'Councillor Engin, you know more of the inner workings of the Matrix than any Time Lord on Gallifrey. Is such a falsification as my other self has described a possibility?'

'No,' said Engin. 'Or it wasn't in my time as Co-ordinator. However, with the Matrix in the hands of those who controlled it after me, inexperienced and politically corrupt as they were, I should say it was not only possible but probable.' His old voice shook with passion. 'I know that even in President Flavia's time my successor was criminally careless in allowing others access to the Key to the Matrix.'

The Doctor turned back to his chief witness.

'All in all Doctor, would you say you have had – are having – a fair trial?'

'Fair?' exploded the Sixth Doctor. 'Fair! Anything but. Trumped-up charges, false evidence.... The Valeyard, a prosecutor quite clearly motivated by personal malice, twisting the law to harm me at every opportunity. A judge, the Inquisitor, who allows him to do it – while maintaining a hollow pretence of impartiality just so things will look good in the edited highlights... The whole basis of the trial changed on the Valeyard's whim! New charges dragged in without notice... Fair? It was a kangaroo court – a lynch mob, robed in Time Lord respectability!'

The Sixth Doctor's voice rose to a bellow that shook the conference room. He jumped up, waving an angry fist – then froze and faded away into nothingness.

A babble of astonished voices rose in the conference room. Only the Doctor was calm.

'It's all right. I've been expecting this for some time. We're fortunate that it didn't happen sooner.'

'That what didn't happen?' asked Flavia.

'I rescued that version of myself from a pseudo time-line, created, I believe, by the Valeyard. I knew he was temporarily unstable, but I needed him to testify as to what was happening to him in this infamous so-called trial. Luckily he lasted long enough to give his evidence.'

'Where is he now, then?'

'Where he always was in a sense – in the courtroom on that space station, undergoing the rest of his trial. That's why it's vital that we bring this inquiry to a successful conclusion – before they finally succeed in destroying him – and me!'

'How do you propose to do that, Doctor?' asked President Niroc. 'Now that your chief witness has disappeared…' He made no attempt to conceal the triumph in his voice.

'By asking you to consider the evidence you have already heard,' said the Doctor. 'I ask you to examine one word in particular – Ravolox.'

The word wiped the sneer from President Niroc's face.

'Let us go back a little,' said the Doctor. 'To the time that President Flavia was deposed.'

'What has that to do with your trial?' demanded President Niroc.

'Everything,' said the Doctor simply. 'President Flavia picked up a rumour that the secrets of the Matrix were being stolen – a rumour to which was attached just one word: Ravolox.'

He looked at Flavia's concerned face. 'What happens? Suddenly out of nowhere a political campaign is mounted, questioning her right to the Presidency. The subsequent election is rigged, to put a pack of Agency puppets in power.

At this, President Niroc leaped to his feet.

'How dare you make these insolent, unproven accusations?'

'Sit down little man,' said the Doctor in an icy voice.

Niroc sat.

The Doctor continued with his indictment, ticking off point after telling point, weaving a chain of circumstantial evidence.

'So – President Flavia is ousted from office in a faked election that must have cost a fortune to arrange. An entire space station is purchased, also at enormous expense, and

moved to an isolated, undetectable location as HQ for a vitally secret project – Operation Ravolox.

'Finally, an incredibly tortuous and complex scheme is set up, first to smear and ultimately to destroy a wandering Time Lord called the Doctor. Why? Purely because he landed, completely by chance, on a planet called – Ravolox.' The Doctor looked round the table. 'A planet identical in every respect to the planet Earth – a planet that *is* Earth, an Earth that has been moved light years from its proper place in a process so brutal that it caused a fireball that almost destroyed the planet.'

'This is wild speculation,' cried President Niroc. But his face was white and his voice shook.

'Then let us speculate a little further,' said the Doctor. 'Let us speculate that the rumour Lady Flavia heard was true and that advanced technical secrets were being stolen from the Matrix. Now, who is responsible for protecting the Matrix and all our Time Lord secrets? Who faces ruin and disgrace if their failure is discovered? The Agency, of course. Let us speculate that the Agency, shutting the proverbial stable door long after lots of high-tech horses have departed, discovers that the thieves originate from Andromeda but have a secret base somewhere on Earth – *which they cannot find.* Desperate not only to prevent the thefts but to conceal them so as to protect its own reputation, the Agency in outrageous, apocalyptic laziness decides on one of the most callous crimes in Time Lord history. They will move Earth billions of miles through space, thus causing a fireball which will "accidentally" destroy all life on the planetary surface. Since this cannot be done without the knowledge and collusion of the President and the High Council –'

'So that is why I was removed from the Presidency,' breathed Flavia. Her eyes were fixed on President Niroc, who shrank from her accusing gaze.

Lady Flavia rose and looked around the table.

'As soon as this inquiry is concluded, I shall place a Motion of Impeachment before the High Council. I shall demand the removal of President Niroc and the holding of a new and honestly conducted election.'

There was a general growl of assent.

'I am sure we will all support you in such a measure,' said the Doctor. 'Meanwhile, if I may continue?'

'Of course, Doctor. My apologies for the interruption.'

'Yet even this horrendous measure was a failure,' the Doctor went on. 'It was worse than a crime, it was a blunder. The secret base of the Andromedans was underground. They put themselves into suspended animation, leaving a robot to guard them and their stolen secrets. Others survived as well and over the long years, Earth returned to barbarism. Savage tribes on the surface, slaves ruled by the Andromedan robot below. Then a wandering Time Lord called the Doctor lands on Ravolox… Panic! He must be discredited and destroyed to prevent discovery of the Agency's crimes and failures.'

'Are you saying that the whole purpose of the Trial was to prevent you from learning about the Agency's involvement in the Ravolox Affair?' asked Flavia.

'I am. I think the trial was set up as soon as it was known I had landed there. Everything else was simply a smokescreen to conceal the Agency's real concerns.'

'But why would they deliberately draw attention to Ravolox by choosing to use the events of your visit there in the trial?'

The Doctor shrugged. 'A typical piece of Agency arrogance. They were attempting the classic double bluff. If they brought up Ravolox first, it looked as though they had nothing to hide.'

A voice from the Matrix screen said, 'Congratulations, Doctor. A very impressive feat of deduction!'

The Master was smiling down at them from the Matrix screen. 'What a pity that your beefy Doctor Watson wasn't here to admire your brilliance. Would you like to see where he is now, by the way?'

Suddenly the screen was filled with a picture of the Sixth Doctor. He was on some kind of desolate beach, sinking slowly into quicksand.

Helpless, they looked on in horror as the bubbling wet sand closed over the Sixth Doctor's curly head...

CHAPTER 20

THE MASTER

The participants in the Presidential Inquiry were in a state of shock. To see the death of the Sixth Doctor was shocking enough. To see the Master at large in the sacred Matrix was positively horrifying.

He lounged smiling in a high-backed chair, the blackness of clothes, hair and neatly pointed beard contrasting with the whiteness of his skin. On a chain around his neck was a huge and elaborate key. He held it up mockingly.

'As you can see, the Doctor's speculation was correct. In fact, all his speculations were!'

The Master's eyes were alight with malice. He was enjoying himself enormously. His mind reached out through the Matrix to touch the Doctor's.

'So it is you, Doctor? Somehow I knew it was!'

'I suppose I should have expected you to be involved,' the Doctor replied. 'How could you resist an affair as sordid as this?'

'How indeed? But what are you doing here, meddling in your own past?'

'You should know that, better than anyone!'

'I should? You must be referring to some abominable crime that I haven't yet committed! I look forward to it immensely!'

He paused. 'But wait a moment. Since your earlier self has now been destroyed, you have been destroyed as well. I'll never have the chance now to do whatever it was that

'I did! What fascinating paradoxes one causes by doubling back on one's own time-stream.'

'My very existence proves that you failed,' said the Doctor defiantly. 'The fact that I exist proves that the Doctor in the Matrix did not die.'

'The Doctor in the Matrix existed as a member of your inquiry, did he not? For a time! Now that he's dead, Doctor, you are little more than his ghost. Soon you too will disappear.'

'You're lying – as usual! I refuse to believe that my earlier self is dead.'

'Nothing is immutable, Doctor,' snarled the Master. 'Least of all time. I have succeeded in cutting short your former time-stream and ending your miserable existence.' He laughed evilly. 'You do realise, Doctor, that you are living on borrowed time? You're temporally unstable now, you know. Soon you'll fade away – just as your earlier self did.'

Everyone in the conference room looked at the Doctor in horrified consternation, as if expecting him to vanish immediately before their eyes.

To their astonishment, the Doctor simply laughed.

'Rubbish! Your analogy is as false as your nature. If my earlier self died I should never have existed – so I should vanish immediately. Which means (only Flavia noticed him crossing his fingers) that that particular Doctor is not dead. Show us the rest of that sequence – I challenge you!'

The Master's smile was a little strained now, but he managed to keep it in place. 'If you insist, Doctor…'

The Master vanished from the screen and the desolate beach took its place. On it crouched a stocky, villainous-looking man clutching a pair of muddy spats. Despairingly

he tossed them into the quicksand. Seconds later he recoiled in horror as the Sixth Doctor rose vertically from the bubbling sand, the spats once more on his feet!

'Like the Master, he's in the Matrix,' said the Doctor. 'It's a realm of illusion and uncertainty. I know – I've been there!'

The Doctor had brief visions of a sword-wielding Samurai warrior, a fast-approaching express train – *his foot was trapped in the railway tracks, he couldn't move* – and an attacking plane. He saw a remorseless hunter, always on his trail, felt a high-powered bullet smash into his arm…

The Master's jeering voice shattering his memories.

'And you are still there, Doctor. Still in the Matrix!'

On the Matrix screen they saw a tall, gaunt figure standing on the dunes above the beach. He wore the long black cloak and high-collared black tunic of a Time Lord Court Prosecutor.

'Who is this person?' demanded Lady Flavia.

'That is the Valeyard,' said the Doctor. 'The learned Court Prosecutor.'

The Master reappeared on the Matrix Screen.

'Tell them the whole truth, Doctor,' he urged mockingly. 'The Valeyard is also you!'

Lady Flavia turned to the Doctor. 'Can this be so, Doctor? What does he mean?'

'Let him tell you,' said the Doctor wearily, sensing what was to come. He had half-realised the terrible truth during his earlier encounter with the Valeyard. So many memories had been revived now that the gaps were filling in fast. He seemed to know not only what had happened but what was still to come for his earlier selves.

Thoroughly enjoying himself the Master said, 'The

Valeyard is an amalgam of the Doctor's darker side, somewhere between his twelfth and thirteenth regenerations. The High Council brought him into being, offering him the Doctor's remaining regenerations, in return for his help in ensuring a satisfactory ending to the Doctor's trial.'

'Abomination upon abomination,' said Lady Flavia. 'You have much to answer for, President Niroc.'

Niroc made no reply.

The Doctor rallied, addressing the sneering figure on the screen. 'But it's all gone horribly wrong, hasn't it? The Valeyard and my earlier self have both escaped to the Matrix.'

'The Valeyard and your other self have been lured to the Matrix,' corrected the Master. 'All part of my plan. Think, Doctor, how much your earlier self has to contend with now. The Valeyard, his evil self, by definition his equal in brains and cunning. Sabalom Glitz, whom the Doctor believes to be a kind of ally but who is my minion, body and soul, ready to betray him, to sell him out at every turn. And finally – me!' The Master chuckled. 'How can I lose? Either the Doctor destroys the Valeyard or the Valeyard the Doctor. In either event, I dispose of the survivor. Think of me, Doctor, when you feel yourself fading into unbeing!'

The Doctor regarded the triumphant figure on the screen.

'That's not all, is it? I sense it. Killing my earlier self, my evil self and finally me is just personal revenge. It lacks the true megalomaniac touch. Where does the bit about conquering the universe come in?'

The Master laughed. 'I'm prepared to start small, Doctor. The universe can come later. I'll be content, for a time at least with ruling Gallifrey!'

Lady Flavia was outraged. 'And just how do you think that

your squalid intrigues can enable you to do that?'

'Not *my* squalid intrigues, Lady Flavia, but yours.'

Flavia jumped up, looking as if she was about to plunge through the screen and cried out, 'You insolent renegade!'

The Master held up his hands in mock fear and apology.

'Your pardon, Lady Flavia. I meant, of course, the squalid intrigues of the High Council – of which you are still a member.'

'The misdeeds of the High Council can and will be corrected,' said Flavia, with a fiery glance at Niroc. 'What has happened is best forgotten. I know we can rely on the Doctor's discretion.'

'Ah, but can you rely on mine?' said the Master mockingly.

'You?' said Flavia scornfully. 'Who will believe you?'

The Master spread his hands. 'Everyone!'

'What have you done?' demanded the Doctor.

'On my instructions, my associate Sabalom Glitz babbled full details of the High Council's infamous Ravolox stratagem at the Doctor's trial.'

'The trial is secret,' insisted Flavia. 'Whatever was said there can remain secret, if we wish it.'

'Not any longer. My agents have seized control of Public Access Television. Relevant extracts from the trial have been transmitting for some time now on every screen in Gallifrey.

'The dirty little secret is out, Lady Flavia – and the outraged citizens of Gallifrey, high and low, are rising in revolt.'

'*Your* agents?' demanded the Doctor. 'You always work alone. When did you have any agents? I imagine Glitz is only in it for whatever baubles you've promised him.

You've done a deal haven't you? The most unscrupulous deal of your career – with the Celestial Intervention Agency.'

'We have come to an accommodation,' said the Master smoothly. 'The Agency is nothing if not pragmatic. There will be a certain amount of chaos at first as this worn-out semi-democracy of yours collapses. As always, there will be a call for a strong man. Then I shall appear, the hero of the hour, with the stolen secrets of the Matrix safely retrieved. Soon, I shall be Lord President – no, Dictator of Gallifrey.'

'And an Agency figurehead,' taunted the Doctor. 'How long do you think you'll last, once the Agency is in power?'

'How long do you think *they* will last – once I'm in power? Now if you'll all excuse me, I still have much to do.'

'Just another of the Master's mad schemes,' said the Doctor dismissively. 'It'll never work.'

'Won't it, Doctor?' The Master started to laugh. 'Listen!'

He faded from the screen leaving only the echo of his mocking laughter. Then, after a while they began to hear something else, not from the screen but from outside the conference room: The distant roar of an angry crowd.

The Doctor jumped up.

'He was right. It's started already!'

Suddenly Captain Vared marched into the room. He came to attention and saluted the President.

'My Lord President.'

'Well, what is it?'

'The Shobogans are revolting!'

The Doctor opened his mouth to make the obvious comment and then closed it again, deciding this wasn't the time.

Niroc stared numbly at the Captain and the Doctor took over.

'What's happening?'

'Someone's been stirring them up. Lots of someones. There are rumours that the High Council's planning even more repressive measures. The Shobogans have broken open the gaols, released the rebels and taken over most of LowTown. We're getting reports of more Outsiders massing all round the Capitol. Presumably the Shobogans are planning to move on the Gates and let them in.'

'Anything else?'

'We're getting reports of armed rebels roaming the Capitol, assassinating public figures and taking over public buildings.'

'Shobogans?'

'That's the official story, but personally I don't think so. They're too well armed and too well trained.'

Agency commando squads, thought the Doctor. The Master was right, they're going for full scale armed insurrection. But before he could speak, Plinoc, the Presidential aide, hurried into the room, robes and hair dishevelled.

'Lord President, you're needed at once. The High Council is meeting – all of it – in the Panopticon hall!'

Full meetings of the High Council were almost unknown. Usually it did its work in a series of small committees – like this present one. Moreover, what was commonly referred to as the High Council was in fact only a sort of Inner Council, those members actively engaged in the process of Government.

'Who summoned this meeting?' asked Flavia.

'No one – it summoned itself. High Council members started streaming into the chamber. Some of them haven't been seen for years. The activists are already forming

revolutionary committees. They're even talking about abolishing the High Council altogether!'

'Typical,' said the Doctor despairingly. 'Doesn't anyone remember the French Revolution? Violent overthrow of corrupt authority, squabbling revolutionary committees, then enter Napoleon – or, in this case, the Master, with one hand stuck inside his black runic!'

Instinctively the group turned to its natural leader, ignoring President Niroc altogether.

Lady Flavia spoke for them all when she asked, 'What must we do, Doctor?'.

The Doctor thought hard. 'Captain Vared, concentrate on the armed insurrectionists, they're the real danger. Leave the Shobogans to me. Can you trust the loyalty of your commanding officers?'

Captain Vared hesitated. 'Not all of them, sir.'

'Consider yourself promoted to General.' He glanced at Lady Flavia who nodded. 'You're in full charge of the whole operation. Direct order of the High Council.' He watched General Vared march out before muttering, 'If there still is a High Council.'Then he turned to address Lady Flavia:'You and your friends here must attend that High Council meeting immediately. Try to sway them in the direction of reform rather than revolution. Tell them about the Master's plan, his alliance with the Agency. The Council must combine to keep them out.'

'What about President Niroc, Doctor?'

They looked round and saw that Niroc had disappeared.

'He's probably in the Council Chamber already, grinding a few political axes of his own. That's where you must defeat him.'

Flavia gathered her fellow Time Lords around her and

hurried out. After a moment, the Doctor followed; but *he* was heading for Low Town.

The Capitol, High Citadel of the Time Lords of Gallifrey is a complex of buildings so vast that it is virtually a city. It has towers and walkways and stately corridors, workshops, laboratories, public buildings and endless suites of Government offices and official living quarters.

At its heart is the stately Panopticon, beneath which is the Eye of Harmony, the trapped black hole which gives energy to all Gallifrey. This public face of the Capitol is well known, but there are other areas which, if equally well-known, are seldom discussed.

Low Town has grown up around and between the mighty pillars which support the base of the Capitol at its outer edges. Over the years, Shobogans and other Outsiders have settled there, one foot in the Capitol but with the Outlands reassuringly close in case the pressures of city life – or the attentions of the Capitol Guard – grow too much for a free spirit.

Occasionally, adventurous young Time Lords will venture into the crowded alleyways, markets and taverns of Low Town. Such expeditions are particularly popular with students at the Academy, and the Doctor had made his fair share of such trips – his instructors would have said rather more than his fair share – in his younger days. Sometimes he'd been accompanied by the Master, at the time when they were still good friends.

Occasionally particularly daring, or drunken, Shobogans would emerge from Low Town and roam the corridors of the Capitol, alarming the staid Time Lord inhabitants. Such expeditions, although not formally forbidden, were not

encouraged by the Capitol Guard, and had a way of ending up with a night in the Capitol gaol.

The Doctor couldn't help thinking of old times as he made his way to the perimeter of the Capitol. Today things felt very different. The vast corridors were deserted. Now and then he'd heard distant shouts and the crackle of blaster fire.

When he had almost reached the outer edge of the Capitol, he chose a building remembered from long ago and made his way down to the service tunnels below. He moved along the dimly lit tunnel until he came to an inconspicuous door, beside which leaned a burly, skin-clad figure.

As the Doctor opened the door, the watcher said mildly, 'I shouldn't, matey.'

'Shouldn't what?'

'Go through there. It's a bad day for Timeys.'

'Do I look like a Timey?' asked the Doctor indignantly.

The burly man studied him thoughtfully.

'Tell you the truth, matey, I'd have a job to say what you look like. But since you're not one of us, you're liable to be taken for one of them and treated accordingly.'

'I'll take my chances.'

'Suit yourself.'

Going through the door and down a flight of stone steps, the Doctor found himself in a long, wide alley between two immensely tall buildings. Torches flared in wall brackets, and street stalls selling food and drink, skins and weapons lined both walls. The narrow space between was crowded with jostling figures, some in the plain robes of respectable townsfolk, others in the fur cloaks, skins and leathers of Outlanders. All the Outlanders were armed –

everything from knives and bows to blasters and even the odd staser-rifle.

'Oh, well,' muttered the Doctor. 'Down these mean streets a Time Lord must go…'

Shoving his way into the crowd, he moved along until he came to an even narrower alleyway over which a blazing torch flared smokily in a metal bracket. The board swinging beneath the bracket showed a faded picture of some exotic once-golden creature.

'The Golden Grockle,' breathed the Doctor reminiscently. 'I wonder if it's still the toughest tavern in Low Town?'

He made his way down the alley, pushed open the heavy wooden doors at the far end and went inside.

He found himself at the top of three long, low steps, at the bottom of which was a square, stone-flagged room with a heavy wooden bar running across the far end. The room was furnished with chairs, tables benches and stools, all in the same heavy wood. Furniture at the Golden Grockle was durable. It needed to be.

This was your basic tavern, inn or pub, thought the Doctor. You found it, or something very like it, on a million worlds in a thousand times.

The tavern, less than half-full, was occupied by little groups of tough, competent looking men, all Outlanders, talking quietly together. A brief silence fell as the Doctor entered then the voices rose again, though more quietly. He went up to the bar, aware that although no one seemed to be looking straight at him, everyone in the place was watching.

'A tankard of Best Old Shobogan,' said the Doctor loudly.

The bartender was a short, bald man in a leather apron roughly as wide as he was high.

'We're not really open to the public tonight, matey,' he said. 'Place is booked for a private party.'

'Well, it doesn't seem to have started yet,' said the Doctor reasonably. He looked round. 'I mean, this isn't my idea of a party. Give me my beer and when the party starts I'll drink up and go.'

The barman looked across at a nearby table. Following his gaze the Doctor saw a small, dark man give an imperceptible nod. The barman then drew an enormous tankard of foaming ale from a barrel behind the bar and slammed it down before the Doctor.

Hoping he hadn't forgotten the knack, the Doctor drew a deep breath, picked up the tankard and downed the contents in one long swallow. He slammed the empty tankard back on the bar.

'And another, please!'

The barman gave him a look.

'You got money?'

The Doctor rooted through all his pockets under the barman's increasingly hostile stare and found a golden Gallifreyan guinea. He tossed it on the bar and heads turned at the ring of gold.

'Keep it and tell me when it's used up,' said the Doctor. 'Anyone care to join me?'

No Shobogan is ever known to refuse a free drink and the Doctor should have been trampled underfoot in the rush to get to the bar.

But nobody moved. A sure sign, thought the Doctor, that something sinister was going on here.

Then the small, dark man at the nearby table said, 'We'll join the generous young gentleman in a tankard, won't we, lads?'

They all got up as a group, gathering round the Doctor and hemming him in. The barman poured tankards for them all and they drank, standing around the Doctor in their tight circle.

'Now maybe you'll tell us what you really want, matey,' said the small, dark man. 'What made you choose this tavern to come and chuck your money about in?'

'I used to come here a lot in the old days,' said the Doctor. He sipped from his tankard more cautiously this time. 'The Golden Grockle always used to be a centre of villainy and rebellion.' He looked around. 'I see it still is!'

The group around him drew closer. One of the men slipped a hand inside his skin jerkin. When it emerged, the Doctor saw the gleam of a knife blade.

'We're just simple Shobogans, enjoying a drink in our neighbourhood tavern,' said the small dark man.

'I think you're rebel leaders plotting an insurrection,' said the Doctor. 'At least, I hope you are.'

'And why would you be hoping a thing like that?'

'Because those are the people I need to talk to. I'm looking for one rebel leader in particular, a man called Kagar. Big red-haired chap. Anyone seen him?'

'You're a damned spy!' shouted the man with the knife.

He lunged at the Doctor who stepped aside, grabbed his arm, twisted and heaved and threw him over the bar.'

The rest of the group hurled themselves on the Doctor, who began to feel he had misjudged the situation. It was pretty certain the rest of them were armed. He might survive one knife wound, but half a dozen or so would finish him.

He struggled wildly yelling,'Get off, blast you. I'm a friend!'

Suddenly the Doctor became aware that the weight of bodies on top of him was lessening. This was because a

red-haired giant of a man was plucking his attackers off him one by one, and tossing them to different parts of the tavern. One or two landed on already-occupied tables leading to splintered furniture, spilled drinks and shouts of protest.

'Is this the way you treat a friend of mine?' roared Kagar, heaving the Doctor to his feet.

'Sorry, Doctor, some of these scum have no manners.'

'Not at all,' gasped the Doctor. 'Very understandable mistake.'

Kagar looked round. 'Where's your friend? Big feller who charged us and knocked us all flying.

'He had to leave. He was only here temporarily.'

The Doctor spared a thought for his earlier self, last seen locked in a death struggle with the Master, the Valeyard, and all the perils of the Matrix – with only Sabalom Glitz for the most unreliable of allies. 'He'll survive it all,' murmured the Doctor. 'He's got to – because if he goes, I go.'

Meanwhile, things were settling down in the tavern. Kagar and the Doctor made their way to a table with fresh tankards of beer. The small, dark man – Kagar introduced him as Marek – sat with them.

'Well, Doctor, what can I do for you?' asked Kagar. 'I tried to kill you and you gave me my freedom. I owe you.'

The Doctor got straight to the point. 'I want you to hold off on the rebellion.'

Kagar growled a protest and the Doctor raised his hand.

'Not abandon it, just hold off until you're sure it's really necessary.'The Doctor then rapidly explained the political background. 'I know the High Council have been oppressing you – but that's all going to change. The people

who've been stirring you up, giving you money and weapons, are working for the Agency. They've got armed insurrectionists roaming around in the Capitol now, committing crimes you'll be blamed for. If they win, you'll be worse off than you could ever imagine.'

When the Doctor had finished, Kagar growled, 'So what do you want us to do?'

'Nothing. Just keep out of it. If you stay neutral the Capitol Guard can deal with the insurrectionists. And if the High Council don't do as I promise, you can still rebel!'

Kagar looked at Marek, who was obviously the thinker amongst the rebels. 'What d'you reckon?'

'I don't trust those Agency bastards,' said Marek slowly. 'And I don't like being used as their pawns. And, like Kagar says, we owe you, Doctor.'

'We?'

'I had a brother in that party of prisoners you set free. You could have handed them over, but you didn't.'

'So what's your answer?'

'All right, Doctor, you've got twenty-four hours. Then I want a meeting with a new High Council to discuss our demands.'

They shook hands on it, drank to the agreement with yet another tankard of Best Old Shobogan, and then the Doctor, burping occasionally and feeling more than a little light-headed, staggered out into the covered alleyways of Low Town.

'So far so good,' he said. 'But this is small stuff. It's what's happening in the Panopticon that really matters…'

CHAPTER 21

THE RETURN

The Panopticon is the most impressive edifice on all Gallifrey. Indeed, it is one of the most impressive in the known universe.

The hall is so enormous that clouds form near the incredibly high roof; sometimes it has even been known to rain *inside*. It occupies the entire central dome of the Panopticon.

An army could parade on the immense marble floor. Innumerable rows of viewing galleries run around the walls.

Used for all important ceremonies, the Panopticon usually presents a tranquil and orderly sight. The assembled Time Lords sit row upon row in their colourful ceremonial robes. Different colours indicate the Chapters, the traditional college-style associations to which all senior Time Lords belong. The orange and scarlet of the Prydonians contrasts with the green of the Arcalians and the heliotrope of the Patraxes. On the central podium, the speaker of the moment, his words discreetly magnified so that all may hear, is invariably listened to with respectful attention.

A very different scene met the Doctor's eyes when at last he reached the Panopticon and gained entry to the hall. The great marble floor boiled and seethed. From the topmost viewing galleries, looking almost directly down upon the scene, it looked just as though someone had kicked over an ants' nest.

Time Lords were everywhere, some in ceremonial robes, some in everyday attire. They clustered into furiously arguing groups which constantly formed, broke up and re-formed. Someone was trying to make a speech from the podium, but the din was such that little of it could be heard.

Even as the Doctor watched, another angry young Time Lord dragged the speaker from the rostrum by force and began a different, presumably opposing speech, which went equally unheard.

'Chaos and anarchy,' murmured the Doctor. 'If things go on like this, the High Council will collapse of its own accord – and the Master will win.'

He looked around the impossibly crowded room and was relieved to spot Lady Flavia, Engin and the others, talking earnestly in a little group not too far from the main door. He hurried over to them.

'How are things going?'

'Difficult to say, Doctor,' said Lady Flavia. 'We are doing our best to rally the moderates, but it isn't easy.'

'As you see,' said old Engin grimly, 'everyone talks but nobody listens!'

'They've split up into all kinds of minority groups and interests,' said Flavia despairingly. 'Everyone has a different plan to take over and reform the High Council. Even Niroc has managed to set up a reform party! We are preparing to try again when things calm down – if they ever do… How is it with you, Doctor?'

'I've managed to persuade the Shobogans to postpone their revolt – but only for twenty-four hours. Unless they can begin talks with a new High Council by then, they'll take matters into their own hairy hands.'

'We're doing all we can, but you see how things are. We

need some great leader to unify us, a person everyone will listen to…' She hesitated as an idea struck her. 'Perhaps if you were to address them?'

'Me?' The Doctor shook his head. 'I'm linked to the scandal that caused all this. Besides, in this incarnation I don't officially exist yet. No, I couldn't win them over –'

Suddenly the Doctor broke off, staring into space – or rather, into his own past, the past which had only recently become available to him once more.

Would it, could it work? he wondered. Dare I even ask?

'What's the matter, Doctor?' asked Flavia in alarm. Was the Doctor about to fade away when they needed him most?

'I couldn't win them over,' repeated the Doctor. 'But I know a Time Lord who could… Lady Flavia, you must hold the fort here. Filibuster if you have to, but don't let them dissolve the High Council until I get back!'

He ran from the Panopticon Hall, leaving behind the scene of mounting chaos.

As he hurried along the deserted corridors a voice yelled, 'Down, Doctor!'

Instinctively the Doctor threw himself flat, just as the fierce crackle of a staser-bolt sizzled over his head. Then the roar of blaster-fire passed over his prone body, this time from somewhere behind him, and he saw a black-clad figure topple from a high balcony, staser-rifle still clutched in lifeless hands.

'Are you all right, Doctor?' called a familiar voice.

He turned and saw General Vared running towards him, leading a squad of the Capitol Guard.

'They nearly got you that time,' he said. 'We've mopped up most of them, but there are still a few snipers left.

Luckily the Shobogans are staying quiet.'

'Only for another twenty-four hours,' said the Doctor, and explained the deal that he'd made.

'Well done, Doctor,' said General Vared. 'Where are you off to now?'

'It's vital that I get to the President's office as quickly as possible.'

'I'll send a couple of my men with you, just in case.'

So it was that, escorted by two of the Capitol Guard, the Doctor reached President Niroc's office without further incident.

Dismissing them with thanks, he hurried inside. The luxurious suite of offices was empty. Presumably Niroc was somewhere in the Panopticon hall, lobbying for dear life – his own.

The Doctor made his way to the Inner Council conference room, and stood looking around. It was quite unchanged. There was the harp on its stand in the corner with the portrait of Rassilon, the legendary Time Lord hero, behind it.

There was a secret door beneath the portrait, but the Doctor was not concerned with that now. He went to the transmat booth in the corner, studied the controls and searched his Time Lord memory for the setting he needed. After a short while he made a careful adjustment and the booth lit up. The Doctor stepped inside and faded away.

He arrived, as he had hoped, in an antiquated transmat booth that stood incongruously in a shadowy corner of a vast cathedral-like chamber. In the centre of the chamber was an enormous bier, on which lay the effigy of a

motionless figure dressed in ancient ceremonial robes.

It took all the Doctor's courage to walk forward and stand before the bier. It wasn't his first encounter with Rassilon, but the experience was always terrifying. He was in the presence of a legend, a remote, all-powerful being who had guided Gallifrey from the beginning. Moreover the Rassilon legend was a mixed one to say the least. Not always wise and kind, Rassilon could be ruthless and cruel.

An example of Rassilon's ruthlessness was before the Doctor's eyes at this very moment. Around the edge of the bier was a frieze of Time Lord figures. If you looked closely, you could see that the eyes of the figures were furiously alive.

The Doctor stood gazing at the figure in the centre. It represented a Time Lord he had loved and revered since his schooldays, a Time Lord with whose help he had battled the Master and the enemies and invaders of Gallifrey. A Time Lord he had delivered into Rassilon's power, to be condemned to an eternity of living death.

Lord President Borusa.

Having played and lost the game of Rassilon, Borusa now lived, if he could be said to live at all, as one of the stone figures set into Rassilon's bier.

It had been a harsh judgement, one the Doctor was now about to challenge. It was a dangerous thing to defy the authority of Rassilon, but this was his one last hope. He had no way of knowing if his scheme would work, or what the consequences would be for himself, but still the Doctor drew a deep breath and raised his voice.

'Lord Rassilon!'

Echoes ran round the vaulted chamber and slowly died away.

For a long, long moment, it seemed that nothing would

happen. Then a deep, husky voice growled: 'What is it now, Doctor? You had better have good reason to disturb my long sleep.'

The voice came from everywhere and from nowhere at once, rolling around the tomb like distant thunder. It was as though the tomb itself had spoken.

'Lord Rassilon, hear me. Gallifrey is in peril…'

In a brief, impassioned speech, the Doctor described the situation – the present corrupt High Council's terrible crimes and its imminent self-destruction.

'There is only one Time Lord who can save us now,' concluded the Doctor. 'I beg you to release him so that he can redeem his past crimes in the service of Gallifrey.'

There was another long pause. Then the great voice said,'You would trust him again, Doctor?'

'With my life, and with the fate of all Gallifrey.'

'He endangered you and all your other selves in his selfish quest for immortality.'

'That was an aberration,' said the Doctor firmly. 'His true self is the one that served Gallifrey so faithfully for so many long years.'

'And if he betrays his trust again?'

The Doctor spoke without hesitation. 'Then I will take his place here.'

'You would risk eternal imprisonment in Borusa's cause?'

'In the cause of Gallifrey – your Gallifrey, Lord Rassilon!'

Once again the voice of Rassilon rolled like angry thunder around the tomb:'So be it, Doctor!'

The bier blurred and shimmered, and suddenly a figure stood before the Doctor – a tall, hawk-faced old man in the robes of a High Cardinal. His hair was white, his face seamed and wrinkled, but his eyes still blazed with

fierce intelligence.

Instinctively the Doctor dropped to his knees, took the old man's hand and kissed it.

'Lord Borusa!'

This, the Doctor realised, was not Borusa's most recent regeneration, the one whose fierce pride had tipped over the edge of ambition into madness. This was an earlier Borusa who had helped him fight off the Sontaran/Vardan invasion. The Borusa who had always been a dedicated servant of Gallifrey.

Borusa touched his old pupil's head for a second and then snapped, 'Get up, boy, get up!'

The Doctor scrambled to his feet and, under Borusa's steady gaze, began to shuffle his feet uneasily, as he had done so often when summoned to his teacher's study at the Academy.

'Another regeneration, eh?' said Borusa at last.

'Yes, sir, the seventh.'

'I don't approve,' said Borusa. 'The form of the incarnation is too young. You were always trouble as a young man, Doctor. I trust that the years have brought wisdom and discretion.'

'I hope so too, sir.'

'Hmm,' said Borusa sceptically. 'Well, come along, Doctor, come along. I understand we have a great deal of work to do!' With that, he strode off towards the transmat booth.

Feeling exactly as if he was back at the Academy, the Doctor followed him.

As he knelt to reset the transmat controls for the Panopticon the Doctor said, 'If I could brief you on the current situation, Lord Borusa –'

'You have already done so,' came the reply. 'A creditable

speech, reasonably clear and concise. Seven out of ten, Doctor.' The Doctor touched a control and they both faded away.

They reappeared in the transmat booth at their destination and emerged into the still-seething Panopticon hall. As Lord Borusa walked across the crowded floor, the quarrelling Time Lords instinctively moved aside for him, like turbulent water parting before the bow of a great ship.

A mounting groundswell of astonished murmurings followed his stately progress across the floor. Feeling rather self-conscious, the Doctor strode along behind him, doing his best to look mature and dignified.

Lord Borusa mounted the speaker's podium. The Time Lord currently using it for an impassioned speech stared at him for one incredulous moment, then hastily bowed and stepped aside. Borusa simply stood there, waiting as the angry voices died down and whispers spread through the Panopticon hall.

'It is Borusa!'

'Borusa has returned to us!'

The Doctor realised that most Time Lords had no idea of the tragic circumstances in which Borusa had left them. As far as they knew, he had merely vanished in mysterious circumstances. Now, equally mysteriously, he had returned.

The imposing figure waited until the silence was complete and then said, 'I am Borusa. Will you hear me?'

There was a respectful murmur of assent.

'I left you, for a time, to go into seclusion. Now I have returned – for a time – to serve you once more, if you will have me.'

Once again the murmur of agreement.

'I ask for your trust and for your obedience – until the affairs of Gallifrey can be so arranged that you may rule yourselves once more. Will you give me that trust?'

There was a long pause and the Doctor held his breath. Then someone shouted, 'Yes! Lead us Lord Borusa!' and there was a general roar of assent, with cries of, 'Lead us, Borusa! Lead us!' from all over the Panopticon hall.

Borusa held up his hand and there was silence once more.

'I must warn you, there are difficult times ahead. As you now know, the High Council, in collusion with the Celestial Intervention Agency, has committed the most heinous of crimes – a crime which has led to armed revolt and to high treason. That High Council must be deposed, and its leaders impeached.'

There was an angry roar of agreement.

'Time Lords, do you so vote?' asked Borusa.

A massive shout of 'Aye!' shook the hall.

'By order of the Full Council, it is so ordained,' said Borusa formally. 'When justice has been done, and when the Agency has been curbed and disciplined, we shall have a new election and a new and honourable High Council. But before there can be a new High Council, we, the Time Lords of Gallifrey, must undo the evil already caused. With your consent, I shall form a temporary Council of Administration to carry out that task. In doing so I can help you to regain the honour of Gallifrey, and I too can regain my own!'

This time the roar of applause almost lifted the dome of the great Panopticon Hall.

The Doctor was saying his farewells. Everyone was frantically busy now, mopping-up after the crisis, and it

was difficult to find a moment to say goodbye.

Borusa had patted his shoulder, told him to stay out of trouble and plunged back into a meeting in Temporal Control.

General Vared had given him a painful handshake and a salute. He was now presiding over a Committee of Inquiry into Agency involvement in the recent disorders, and heads were rolling.

The Doctor found Lady Flavia, now a leading member of the Council of Administration, deep in preparation for the coming negotiations with the Shobogans.She passed on a warm invitation to victory celebrations in the Golden Grockle which the Doctor reluctantly declined.

'I'm too old for that sort of night out now. Besides, it's time I was on my way,' he said. 'I shouldn't really be here at all!'

'Take a look at this before you go, Doctor.'

She showed him a video transcript of the end of the Sixth Doctor's trial. They watched a now obsequious Inquisitor telling the Sixth Doctor, who seemed to have survived the hazards of the Matrix and be in excellent form, that all charges were dismissed and that they owed him an immense debt of gratitude. His freedom restored, the Sixth Doctor went cheerfully on his way. The Doctor sensed that his other self was happy to know that Peri was alive and well, and looking forward to travelling with new companion Mel – if she'd only stop feeding him carrot juice.

'All those taking part in that travesty of a trial will soon be on trial themselves,' said Flavia grimly. 'We must determine which were rogues and which were fools.'

The Master and Sabalom Glitz were trapped in the

Matrix, where they would remain for the time being.

'We can deal with them at our leisure,' said Flavia. 'We have more important things to worry about than two petty criminals!'

The Doctor smiled, thinking how hurt the Master would feel at that description, not to mention being classified with Sabalom Glitz.

'And the Valeyard?' he asked.

Flavia gave him a worried look. 'I ordered his arrest but he is nowhere to be found.'

'Don't worry about it,' said the Doctor. 'We're bound to meet again – after all, he's almost a part of me! Goodbye, Lady Flavia. I'm sure we'll meet again too – if we haven't already!'

The Doctor made his way to his TARDIS, still in the anteroom to the President's office. He disappeared inside, and soon the TARDIS disappeared as well.

The Doctor was almost whole again now, most of his memories restored.

What he didn't realise was that the hardest task of all still lay ahead of him.

CHAPTER 22

HOLIDAY WITH DANGER

Sitting in his TARDIS, elbows on his knees, chin in his hands, the Seventh Doctor was in trouble.

As far as appearances went, this particular Doctor made an unimpressive figure. Small, dark and not particularly handsome, his only distinctive feature was his penetrating grey eyes.

His clothes were as undistinguished as his appearance: shabby check trousers, brown sports jacket, garish Fair Isle pullover. A battered straw hat and a red-handled umbrella hung from the nearby hatstand.

There were no obvious indications that the Doctor was in trouble. He was safe inside the TARDIS, where no enemy could reach him and there was no unexpected trap waiting for him there – yet.

No, the Doctor's enemy was inside his own mind. For no particular reason, he was feeling depressed.

It was a condition which occasionally attacked Time Lords, especially those with half their regenerations behind them. In fact, the condition attacked most intelligent lifeforms and was well known on many planets, including old Earth.

There it was known as accidie, and to the Church it was a mortal sin – a denial of God. It was also known as ennui, the megrims, the blues, or the black dog. But whatever the name, the symptoms were always the same: listlessness, boredom, a sense that life was ultimately meaningless

and futile, without point or purpose.

If short-lived humans can be oppressed by such feelings, how much more vulnerable is a Time Lord, weighed down by the burden of regeneration after regeneration. When life seems to have no value, an almost unending supply is a curse, not a blessing.

The Doctor could remember mornings on Gallifrey when a daisy on a snowy mountainside or a drop of dew gleaming on a blade of grass was a sufficient reason for living.

No longer.

He told himself he was simply bored, that perhaps, much as he hated to admit it, he was lonely. He badly missed having a travelling companion to share his journeys with.

Both problems could easily be remedied.

The cosmos was full of excitement and adventure. As for companions, well – Earth, and any other planet with intelligent life, was full of sentient life-forms eager to see the Universe at his side.

But the Doctor was sick of risking his neck in some noble cause – and even more sick of doing nothing. Fed up with being wise and kindly and patient and patronisingly paternal, his persona had darkened, he had become detached. He could barely believe some of the things he had done these last few years. And now, no one was here, and he realised with a cold bitterness just how much he hated being alone.

The Doctor knew in his hearts that he should go back to Gallifrey and place himself in the hands of the Chief Hospitaller and his team of psycho-techs. There were drugs, there was neurosurgery, there was endless well-meaning talk…

Even then, though, a cure was by no means guaranteed.

Some Time Lords recovered, but others wandered off into the Outlands and were never seen again.

The treatment of last resort was a forced regeneration, in the hope that the melancholia would be left behind in the discarded form…

The Doctor knew that he ought to go back to Gallifrey. But he had left the place in a gesture of independence and it stuck in his craw to go crawling back for help now.

'Not yet,' he muttered. 'Later, if I must, but not yet. 'Doctor, heal thyself!'

So what could he do? The Doctor knew that sometimes the condition simply lifted as mysteriously as it had come, but he couldn't just sit around drinking tea in the TARDIS and waiting to feel better…

'The Brigadier would say I needed a holiday,' he said to himself. 'Been overdoing it, Doctor,' the Brigadier would bark. 'Get away somewhere for a rest. Try Cromer…'

The opposite choice, of course, was to deliberately court danger. Nothing made you appreciate life like nearly losing it. Why not try both?

'A holiday with danger,' muttered the Doctor, and laughed for the first time in weeks. 'I know the perfect place. I've been there twice and both times it nearly killed me. Well, let's give it another chance. Maybe this will be a case of third time lucky! Come on, Doctor, kill or cure!'

The Seventh Doctor got up, went over to the control console, and punched in the co-ordinates for that well-known beauty spot Metebelis III, famous blue planet of the Acteon Galaxy.

While the Doctor was battling depression, his greatest enemy, the Master, was teetering on the verge of madness.

His descent into savagery on the Cheetah planet after his last encounter with the Doctor had tipped the balance of a mind always prone to paranoia over into uncontrollable obsession.

Having now regained enough control to make his escape, the Master was determined to destroy the Doctor once and for all, even if it meant he had to die in the process.

He was sitting by a dying camp-fire on a distant desert planet on the remote fringes of Mutters Spiral. This planet was inhabited by a handful of ferocious lifeforms and an equally ferocious humanoid species, the Morgs. It was midnight and he was surrounded by savages, wrapped in skins.

Skeletally thin with warped, bony faces, the Morgs lived on roots and insects and fruit, and the flesh of such small animals as they could catch. In fact, they would eat anything that didn't eat them.

They were a miserable tribe of half-starved barbarians but they had one great secret, something that was worth coming all this way to find: they could cheat death.

The Master threw open the treasure chest he had brought from his TARDIS. There were silver goblets, gold trinkets, priceless gems, a necklace of diamonds, a sapphire tiara – the casual loot of a thousand crimes. It meant nothing to him – he had even offered it to Sabalom Glitz once as a bribe, not that he'd ever have handed it over, of course.

Despite, or perhaps because of, their poverty, the Morgs had a love of jewels and precious metals that amounted to worship. They probably did worship them, thought the Master, carrying them off to some hidden altar. He lifted a diamond necklace from the chest and turned it in his hands, making it sparkle in the firelight. As the Old Chief

reached out a bony hand, the Master dropped the necklace back into the chest and slammed it shut.

'You know what I want.'

The Old Chief in turn took the lid from a crude clay pot at his feet. Inside there writhed a duster of dark and slimy creatures, half hidden in a bed of leaves.

He replaced the lid and offered the pot to the Master, who shook his head. 'First I must have proof.'

The Old Chief pointed to one of the Morgs around the fire.

'Kill him.'

Suspecting a trap the Master drew back.

'I'm not your butcher. Kill him yourself.'

With terrifying speed the Old Chief whipped a long knife from beneath his skins and thrust it deep into the tribesman's heart. The man fell, twitched for a moment and then died in silence.

'Watch!' said the Old Chief.

For several minutes, nothing happened. Then something black, slimy and snake-like slid from the dead man's mouth. It reared up, showing two red eyes and a slit of a mouth, and seemed to look round the silent circle of tribesmen, as if searching. Suddenly it flashed through the air and one of the Morgs fell back choking. For a moment he writhed, clutching at his throat, and then he became calm, resuming his place by the fire. The Old Chief jabbed the man he had killed with his foot.

'*His* spirit now lives in *him*'.

He pointed to the Morg now sitting peacefully by the fire.

'How does it work?' asked the Master eagerly.

'You swallow the deathworm before you go into danger. It becomes dormant and lives inside your body. If you are

killed it absorbs your essence, body and spirit. It lives on in your remains – in the ashes even, if the body is burned. As soon as it can, it seeks a new host. It takes over the host and then it dies, but you live again in a new body!'

Eyes gleaming, the Master picked up the clay pot and clasped it to him. Leaving the treasure chest behind, he strode towards his TARDIS, which now looked like a pillar of red sandstone.

The Master smiled in the darkness. What exquisite revenge: to destroy the Doctor by becoming the Doctor – or rather, by forcing the Doctor to become him.

All he had to do now was get himself killed.

The Seventh Doctor sat beside his TARDIS on a wide ledge, mountains rising steeply at his back. The ledge overlooked a shimmeringly beautiful blue lake on Metebelis Three. Far below, the countryside was calm and peaceful. A blue moon sailed serenely across the sky, shedding a uniquely beautiful light.

A shadow fell over the Doctor, there was the sound of beating wings and a bird as big as a spaceship flew slowly across the full moon. The Doctor sat very still, not wishing to be snatched up as a late-night snack for the great Roc's nestlings.

He thought back to his last visit. He had destroyed the Great Spider and freed the people of the planet from enslavement by a breed of super spiders.It had cost him a regeneration, but it had been worth it.

It had been a good idea to come back here, he realised. His earlier visits had been stormy, to say the least, but now at last the planet was living up to its reputation. He could feel his spirits lifting under the influence of its calm

beauty… Had the Doctor seen the glowing eyes in the dark mountain crevice behind him, he might have felt differently.

A huge, dark, eight-legged shape appeared. It crept closer, closer…

At last it sprang, landing between his shoulder-blades with a horrid soft plop. The Doctor felt the sting of its fangs in his neck and then darkness swept over him.

When the Doctor awoke, he was hanging from a giant web across the mouth of the crevice, wrapped up from head to foot in sticky spider filaments. From inside, the huge spider studied him with her glowing eyes.

'You were rash to come here,' she said in a high clear voice. 'Our rule is broken now and the other two-legs hunt us down, but a few of us survive to take our revenge.'

Leaving him, she disappeared into her crevice.

The Doctor struggled furiously, but he was quite helpless. He wondered how long it would be before the spider returned to start eating him. Perhaps she liked a little nap before supper. Perhaps she had gone to invite her friends round to dinner.

At this point, the Doctor discovered that the second part of the Metebelis holiday cure was working. Now that his life was nearly over, he suddenly realised how desperately he wanted it to continue.

'Late-night supper for a spider,' he muttered. It was such an undignified way for a Time Lord to go.

Suddenly, incredibly, he heard a wheezing, groaning sound.

For a second he thought the TARDIS was leaving him, but by twisting his head he saw another TARDIS appear and blend with his own. The TARDIS door opened and a tall

young man with longish brown hair stepped out – and stood looking down at his swaddled form with astonishment.

Their eyes met, time froze, and their minds touched. The Eighth Doctor was whole again at last.

All the Seventh Doctor's memories flooded instantly into his mind. But this time there was more. All his own memories returned as well – right up to the moment when he had sprung the Master's trap.

Suddenly he knew the Seventh Doctor's future – what little there was of it.

How could he tell him?

How could he not?

Hastily shielding the knowledge in his mind, the Doctor became aware that his seventh self was talking to him.

'Explanations later,' croaked the strained voice. 'Are you going to stand there gawping or are you going to get me out of this blasted cocoon?'

Hurriedly the Doctor bent down to free his other self. It wasn't easy. The spider's filament was like incredibly strong and sticky string. It couldn't be broken but it could, with care, be unwound.

The process took a considerable time and long before it was finished the time bubble burst and time resumed its normal flow. The Doctor had got most of the Seventh Doctor free and was about to start work on his feet when a high clear voice rang out.

'Another two-legs! I shall feast well tonight.'

The Doctor leaped back, looking around for a weapon, a chunk of loose rock, anything... There was nothing within reach.

Springing past her still-bound first victim the giant spider

stalked towards him.

The Doctor began feeling frantically through his pockets. A paper bag – the thing probably didn't care for jelly-babies. What else?

The spider sprang, its huge black shape blocking out the blue moonlight…

The Doctor's hand came out of his pocket holding a squat stubby gun. He fired and the spider gave a high-pitched scream of agony before seeming to vanish. Something quite small dropped at his feet. He looked down and saw the body of an ordinary spider, curled up into a ball in its death agony.

He looked at the Master's Tissue Compression Eliminator with a strange mixture of relief and distaste.

Then he went to the edge of the ledge and hurled it away, watching as it spun shining through the blue moonlight to disappear beneath the waters of the lake far below.

He went back and finished freeing his other self.

Not long afterwards the two Doctors sat in the TARDIS, enjoying a civilised cup of tea.

'Ah, well, thanks,' said the Seventh Doctor, brushing the remains of sticky filaments from his jacket. 'Lucky you had the Master's TCE handy!'

'I expect he's got a spare.'

There was a moment of silence. The Doctor seemed preoccupied. He was realising what the Sixth Doctor had meant about it being tricky to meet your previous incarnation. He knew the Seventh Doctor's fate. He knew of the trap in the TARDIS and the hail of bullets in San Francisco.

Yet if he warned the Seventh Doctor, and if the Doctor

escaped the perils that lay ahead, he himself might never come to exist.

The Seventh Doctor surveyed him with keen interest, half sensing the turmoil in his successor's mind.

'Well, I must say it's interesting to meet me!' he said.

'It's all become rather complicated…'

'Never mind. I'm just glad you turned up when you did, or I'd have been a spider's supper.'

There was another awkward silence.

Doing his best to make conversation, the Seventh Doctor said, 'Look, whose TARDIS is this, yours or mine?'

'Both! When TARDISes from different time zones coincide very closely in space they seem to – merge.'

'Does that mean we have to share from now on?'

The Doctor smiled. 'Don't worry! The way it seems to work is I leave and you dematerialise. When you've gone, my TARDIS is still there so I can dematerialise in turn.' He stood up, abruptly. 'I'd better go.'

'So soon? I was just getting to know me!'

'It will create a lot of awkward temporal paradoxes if we spend too much time together. Especially since –'

'– we're so closely linked in time,' the little man finished the sentence for him. 'You're the next one, aren't you?'

'Yes, I'm the next. I really must go.'

'Well, if you must.'

They shook hands, then the Seventh Doctor operated the door control and the Doctor moved to the door. He paused for a moment, and seemed to reach a decision.

'Look, you'll be getting a telepathic message soon, from an old enemy…'

'And?'

'You'd do well to ignore it. It's a trap. A – deadly trap.'

The Seventh Doctor held up his hand.

'Thank you – but don't tell me any more. This meeting puts you in an impossible position, I can see that.'

'I didn't know what to say,' said the Doctor apologetically. 'But I had to say something…'

'No one needs to know the hour of his end, not even a Time Lord. Besides, if I don't fulfil my destiny, how can you fulfil yours?'

'I felt I had to warn you.'

'We'll just let things take their destined course, shall we? Time will tell – it always does!'

'Thank you,' the Doctor said. 'And good luck!'

They shook hands and the Doctor went out into the blue moonlight of Metebelis III.

Left alone, the Seventh Doctor drew a deep breath.

Then he started to operate the dematerialisation controls, setting them so that the TARDIS would hover for a while in the space-time continuum.

He felt extraordinarily cheerful. His depression had completely vanished. Life had never seemed sweeter.

Mind you, there was no telling how much of it remained to him. Nice of that young fellow to try to warn him.

However long or short the time that remained, the Seventh Doctor was determined to enjoy every second of it. He'd reconfigure the TARDIS, the way he'd always planned. Something Gothic-looking with redwood panels. New control switches and a new scanner… He would re-read 'The Time Machine' in that signed first edition H.G. had presented him with when they had said goodbye last. And when the mysterious message came from an 'old enemy', he'd answer it.

Despite the young fellow's warning, he found it hard to feel too worried.

He idly wondered what kind of mad scheme this enemy would be hatching…

In his TARDIS, the Master smiled in triumph, regarding the wriggling creature in the glass dish before him. In his laboratory, using the techniques of accelerated genetic engineering, he had reprogrammed, modified and improved the deathworms, giving them much boosted capabilities.

True, he'd killed all but one of them in the process, but one super-deathworm remained and that was enough.

He was sure his scheme would work. The Doctor never could resist a good sob story.

And once the Doctor was alone with the Master's remains…

He saw by the decrease in the rise and fall of the Time Rotor that he had nearly reached his destination.

It was time.

With a grimace of distaste, the Master picked up the glass dish, tilted his head back, opened his mouth and let the deathworm slither down his throat.

His TARDIS landed.

Opening the doors, the Master stepped out into a metal plain, surrounded by metal towers. Behind him, his TARDIS, obeying pre-set instructions, dematerialised. It would be safe in the space-time continuum until he recovered it.

Alone and unafraid, the Master stood in the centre of the metal plain and watched the metallic creatures gliding towards him. They gathered around him in a menacing circle, still too astonished to speak.

The Master threw back his head and laughed.

'Yes, it's me – your old ally, the Master! What have you got to say for yourselves, you stupid tin boxes!'

CHAPTER 23

RASSILON'S GAME

Bathed in shimmering blue moonlight, the Doctor was watching his seventh self s TARDIS detach itself from his own and dematerialise. He stood for a moment absorbing the beautiful scene, feeling reluctant to leave.

Suddenly a shadow fell over him and he heard the beat of enormous wings. He looked up and saw a vast dark shape swooping down, claws extended.

'That roc again…!'

With a yell of alarm, he took a flying leap towards the door of his TARDIS, opened it and disappeared inside. Undeterred, the giant bird of prey snatched up the TARDIS in its giant claws and carried it away.

A few minutes into its flight the blue thing made a strange sound and disappeared from between its claws. With an indignant squawk, the bird flew off to look for easier prey.

Inside the TARDIS, the Doctor was unsurprised to see the controls moving of their own accord. He was being summoned, perhaps for the last time.

When the TARDIS landed he opened the doors and stepped out, finding himself, as he had expected, before Rassilon's tomb. He looked first at the frieze, and was pleased to see Borusa's space still blank. Perhaps he had at last earned the peace he had scorned in the days of his madness.

The Doctor felt rather than saw the brooding presence of Rassilon.

'Well, Doctor, you are whole again.'

'With your help, Lord Rassilon.' he said, softly. 'I rather think you have guided me every step of the way.'

'As you once said yourself, Doctor, a man is the sum of his memories, and a Time Lord even more so. You needed your other selves, just as they needed you. For a time I needed you – to make one or two small improvements in the patterns of history.'

The Doctor bowed his head. 'I am honoured to serve you.'

Rassilon laughed. 'The game is over now, Doctor.'

'Is the game ever over, Lord Rassilon?'

'For you a new game is beginning, Doctor. One you must play alone.'

The Doctor contemplated the infinity of choices before him.'Where shall I begin?'

'Surely you have unfinished business on the planet Earth?'

Memories came flooding back.

'That poor girl – I abandoned her, deserted her when she needed me!'

The laughter of Rassilon rolled around the vault like thunder.

'No, you didn't Doctor. Not yet!'

Suddenly he was back in the TARDIS and the TARDIS was in flight.

The Doctor was standing with his hands resting on the console, memories of his other selves flooding through his mind.

He had all their memories, *his* memories now.

He had a lot to live up to.

The TARDIS landed and the Doctor prepared to open the door. Something soft struck against his foot. He bent down and picked up a plastic shopping bag.

Sam turned away from the police box just as the Doctor, still clutching the plastic bag, staggered into the yard.

'There he is,' she whispered.

Ignoring them, the Doctor made his way to the door of the police box and leaned against it for a moment. Somehow the action seemed to give him strength. He fished a key from his pocket and opened the door.

'Doctor?' said Sam. 'Are you all right?'

He turned and stared at her, the blue eyes wide and unseeing. There was a livid bruise across one side of his forehead.

'You've been hurt,' said Sam. 'What happened?'

'Sorry,' said the Doctor. 'Must get away…wrong time… wrong place…'

'Oi, you!' screamed a voice from the gate.

Baz stood in the doorway, with Pete, Little Mikey and Mo behind him.

'Where d'you think you're going with my gear, Doc?'

Ignoring him, the Doctor turned to Sam.

'Goodbye.'

He stepped inside the police box, closing the door behind him. Baz rushed forward and hammered on the door. There was a strange wheezing, groaning sound and suddenly he was hammering on nothingness.

Slowly Baz turned round, stunned, as they all were, by the impossibility of what he'd just seen. But he still had a good grasp of his priorities.

'I'm a dead man without that gear,' he said conversationally.

He slipped a hand inside his jacket and took something out. There was a click, and the long thin blade of a flick-knife sprang from his fist.

'Hey!' shouted Trev in alarm.

Baz was too far gone even to notice. 'I brought this with me – for the Doctor!'

'Well, he's gone now,' said Sam. 'You've missed your chance.'

'Ah, but you're still here,' said Baz. 'And you started all this, didn't you Sam?'

The blade of the knife gleamed as he advanced towards her.

The wheezing, groaning sound came again, and suddenly, impossibly, the police box was back. The Doctor stepped out, the plastic bag in his hand.

There was a wail of police-car sirens from the street. Ignoring the sound, Baz whirled round and ran towards the Doctor and the plastic bag, the knife in his hand pointing skywards.

As Baz reached him, the Doctor raised the plastic bag and swung it down, skewering it on the point of Baz's knife, just as policemen started running into the yard.

'Excellent!' cried the Doctor, and went back into the TARDIS. Sam suddenly sprinted across the yard, leaping through the closing doors as the police box faded away.

There was a good deal of confusion in the statements of the police officers who arrested Baz and his mob. Some said there had been a police box in the yard, some said there hadn't. Some actually said there had been a police box and then it had just vanished, but that was ridiculous.

The girl had certainly disappeared but the police theory was that she was simply scared. She'd turn up again when things calmed down a bit and Baz was safely locked up, no matter what those two teachers thought.

The one thing everyone remembered was Baz standing with a bag of drugs held up high on the point of his flick-knife with little white rocks and powder in his hair.

One of the policemen said he looked just like the Statue of Liberty.

Samantha Jones shot into the TARDIS, skidded across the floor and cannoned into the Doctor, who was just setting the controls. They both ended up on the ground, and by the time the Doctor was on his feet, the TARDIS was in flight.

He helped Sam up, and she looked around the control room. 'Ah!'.

'Look, I expect you're feeling a bit confused and frightened,' said the Doctor. 'Don't worry. Everything's all right. You're quite safe. Let me try and explain –'

Sam cut him off. 'Don't bother. This is the control room of a space ship, right?'

'It's *a* control room,' said the Doctor loftily. 'You should see my new control room, now that's really something.'

'But this is a space ship?'

'The TARDIS travels through time and space,' said the Doctor. 'And it's dimensionally transcendental. That means it's -'

'Bigger on the inside than the outside,' said Sam impatiently. 'I can see that for myself. What did you say it was called?'

'The TARDIS – the initial letters of Time And Relative

Dimension In Space. The name was coined by my granddaughter, Susan.'

Sam gave him a look. 'Sure it was. And you're an alien?'

'I'm a Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey,' said the Doctor, quite eager now to shock. 'It's in the constellation of Kasterborus, 29,000 light years from Earth. And as for my being an alien – well, to me you're an alien. Actually I'm quite used to humans, I lived on Earth for a while.'

Sam studied him thoughtfully.

'Well, as aliens go you're an improvement on the little green guys with pointy heads.'

'You're very kind.'

'Am I being abducted?'

'Certainly not.' No one asked you in here. You forced your way in. If anyone's being abducted, it's me.'

Sam continued her own train of thought.

'If I'm being abducted, okay, it's an experience. But no funny stuff.'

'I beg your pardon?' said the Doctor, outraged.

'No medical examination, no experiments. Nothing weird.'

The Doctor was losing patience.

'The weirdest thing around here, young woman, is you. I'd better get you home.'

Sam shook her head. 'Nope.'

'What do you mean, "nope"? Don't you want to go home?'

'I want a trip first. Somewhere. Anywhere in the universe.'

'This isn't a tour bus –'

Sam pointed to the centre column of the control console. It was rising and falling steadily.

'I take it that means we're moving?'

'It does.'

'Where to?'

'Since you jogged me when I was setting the co-ordinates – I've no idea.'

'Never mind Are we heading for another place, another time?'

'We are.'

'Okay, take me there – wherever. Show me you're telling the truth. For all I know this is all done with mirrors and we're still sitting in the junkyard.'

'What about your parents, friends, Coal Hill School, all that?'

Sam thought for a moment. 'You say this thing travels in time?'

'That's right.'

'Well, you can take me back ten minutes after we left. Or even before we left so it never happened.'

'Well, possibly… Though that might be a bit tricky.'

'You do know how to work this thing?'

'Of course I do! Well, usually…'

'OK then, just one trip. Deal?'

'Deal,' said the Doctor resignedly. He looked at her in mild amusement. 'You're taking it all very calmly.'

'Why not? I've seen the movies and the shows on telly. Aliens and UFOs are everywhere these days.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'I've had a lot of human companions over the years but never one like you.'

'Thanks for the compliment!'

'I'm not sure it was one. I think they must be breeding a new kind of human female.'

'What's your name?' asked Sam.

'You can call me the Doctor.'

'That's not a name it's a title. What's the rest of it?

'Smith. Doctor John Smith.'

Sam laughed. 'I don't believe it.'

'What's so funny? It's a perfectly good name.'

'Of course it is! It's just that, well – you're Smith and I'm Jones. Samantha Jones.'

She held out her hand and they shook hands.

'Fancy that,' said Sam. 'Smith and Jones. It's a sign.'

'A sign of what?'

'That we were just made for each other.'

'I very much doubt it.'

As she followed the Doctor out of the old console room and towards the new one, Sam put on her best Bogart accent.

'Doc, this could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship!'

EPILOGUE

President Flavia stood in Temporal Control before the giant central monitor screen. Chief Temporal Technician Volnar adjusted controls and the screen came to life.

A long, glowing line appeared. Pulsing points of light divided it into eight segments of varying lengths. Seven of the segments were blue, the eighth a vibrant red. It was noticeable that the left-hand segment was very long, while the red right-hand segment, the current one, was very short.

The long line stretched across the screen in a proper, orderly fashion. The shorter red line at the end in its correct place, was blinking steadily, to show that this was the current incarnation.

Volnar cleared his throat.

'Madam President, this tempograph represents the current state of the Doctor's time-streams. As you can see, it has returned to normal. The Eighth Doctor has completed his visitations to his former selves, abandoned his temporal peregrinations and returned to his proper place in space and time.'

He beamed at President Flavia, as if personally responsible for the return to order.

'Thank you, Chief Technician,' said Lady Flavia. 'I am glad to hear it.'

She stood for a moment, studying the steadily blinking red line. It was so short, compared with all the others. How long could the Doctor go on?

She seemed to see the Doctor, a tall, handsome young man with long hair and bright blue eyes, smiling at her.

But when had they met? Had it been during the shadowy Borusa interregnum, that dark period between her Presidencies?

She saw the the dignified white-haired figure of Borusa at the speaker's podium in the Great Hall of the Panopticon. Was that the Doctor behind him, keeping modestly in the background, but the true saviour of Gallifrey all the same?

It had all been a long time ago and the memory was fading, becoming dream-like…

One day, she was sure, the Doctor would return to Gallifrey. But not yet.

He was young again, he was beginning a new incarnation, and all the cosmos lay before him.

Wishing the Doctor well in his future adventures, Lady Flavia turned and left the Temporal Control Room.

APPENDIX:

EXTRACT FROM THE SECRET SCROLLS OF GALLIFREY

…And so Lord Borusa came back to us in our time of greatest need and helped undo the evil of Niroc's corrupt High Council.

Once more the Magnetron was used, this time to draw the Earth and its sun and its solar system back to its proper place in space and time.

By the great skill of Borusa and his Temporal Engineers, time itself was folded back, so it was as though this great crime had never occurred.

For this reason, the memories of those who took part in the strange events were blurred. All that happened seemed to fade from their minds. Thus the time of our great shame is almost forgotten.

When all was done, Lord Borusa left us again, saying only that he had purged his crime and was going to share Rassilon's long repose.

After the Borusa Interregnum new elections were held. There was a new High Council, and Lady Flavia began her long and successful reign as President of Gallifrey.

Peace returned to the Capitol, and even the Shobogans were content with their lot.

Strange rumours persist that the Doctor, then a prisoner of the Agency on their hidden space station, was at the same time present on Gallifrey, where he

helped to shape events. Some say it was the Doctor who persuaded Borusa to return.

None save Lord Rassilon himself knows if this is true...

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Recuperating after the trauma of his recent regeneration, the Doctor falls foul of a final booby-trap set by his arch-enemy, the Master.

When he recovers, the disorientated Doctor looks in a mirror and sees the face of a stranger. He knows only that he is called "the Doctor" – nothing more. But something deep inside tells him to trust the TARDIS, and his hands move over the controls of their own accord.

The TARDIS takes him to a strangely familiar junkyard in late-nineties London, where he is flung into a confrontation between local drug-dealers and Samantha Jones, a rebellious teenager from Coal Hill School.

But the Doctor soon finds the TARDIS transporting him to various other places in order to recover all his memories – and that involves seeing seven strangely-familiar faces . . .

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